ALEXANDER KUPRIN

THE BRACELET OF GARNETS

AND OTHER STORIES

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BY

ALEXANDER KUPRIN

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION BY

LEO PASVOLSKY

EDITOR OF "THE RUSSIAN REVIEW"

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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PREFACE

THE translator's task is sometimes rendered difficult not so much by the actual work of turning into another language the writings of the author, as by the necessity of choosing among the author's works those which ought to be presented to the readers of the other language. It is a great privilege, therefore, to base one's choice upon what the author himself considers his best work. My choice of stories was based upon the list contained in the following letter:

"MY DEAR MR. PASVOLSKY:—I feel flattered because you have asked me to make a selection of my works for translation, especially since we have no literary treaty either with America or with England. I consider the following of my works the most successful: An Evening Guest; The Læstrygonians; A Bracelet of Garnets; Demir-Kayá; The Jewess; Emerald; The Horse-Thieves; The Park of Kings; An Insult; Sulamith; A Coward, besides those which you mention in your letter.

"A. KUPRIN."

I have chosen from this list those stories in which I consider Mr. Kuprin to be at his best. And he is at his best in two types of stories.

There is wholeness about Kuprin as a writer, which breathes of the strength and power of Russia herself; not the chiselled and filed out artificiality of words which is often used as a substitute for natural strength and charm, but simplicity, which is power itself, an extensive knowledge of life, and a deep and sincere love for it. When he writes in this style, Kuprin creates an atmosphere which inevitably carries us away; we live in the beauty or the horror of that bit of life which the magic pen of the writer conjures up before us. This manner Kuprin uses in some of his fairly long stories. The other style, in which Kuprin seems to me at his best, is the very short story, of three or four pages. And he is really a master of this most difficult manner of short-story writing.

I have tried to present Kuprin in both of these manners. In "A Bracelet of Garnets" one cannot but become transported into that atmosphere of a "love that repeats itself but once in a thousand years." In "The Jewess" one is carried away by the impelling beauty of a Jewish woman, fascinatingly lovely, though living in filth and ignorance in a road-house. In "The Horse-Thieves" the tints of horror are sombre and black, but irresistibly compelling. In "The Læstrygonians" the magic of words is so complete that, even after laying the book aside, one still sees oneself on the beautiful Balaklava Bay, with the sinuous lines that mark the darting courses of the fish radiating and intertwining in all directions.

In some of the very short stories Kuprin finds it possible to compress into a few pages what another

writer may not express in a volume. "The Legend," "Demir-Kayá," "The Garden of the Holy Virgin" were chosen for this reason. The latter was written on the first anniversary of the war and is really a striking expression of the reaction of a writer, who loves Life as Kuprin does, to the diabolic fury of destruction of life that has struck the world like a tempest, sent forth by the grim breath of Death.

LEO PASVOLSKY.

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INTRODUCTION

ALEXANDER IVANOVICH KUPRIN was born in 1870, and published his first collection of short stories in 1903. Shortly after, he attained the full dignity of authorship, for in 1910 his "works" were published at Petrograd in six volumes, subsequently extended to fourteen. He has not, however, been so prolific as Gorky or as Andreyev, his foremost living rivals.

When Tolstoy died, in 1910, the last of the Titans vanished. The giants of prose fiction in Russia were all men of the nineteenth century: Pushkin, Gogol, Turgeniev, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy. Pushkin is, of course, much better known as a poet than as a master of prose; but his short stories display exquisite art, and he is really the Russian pioneer in this branch of literature.

I believe that if Garshin (1855–88) had lived ten years longer, he might have become the true heir to the Russian literary throne, for his tales bear the unmistakable sign, not of brilliant or clever talent, but of the inspiration of genius. Despite the extraordinary power, charm, and versatility of Chekhov (1860–1904), despite his enormous and ever-increasing popularity, it is my conviction that Garshin had a greater natural endowment than he.

Nearly all Russian novelists are and have been masters of the difficult art of the short story, the only

notable exception being Dostoyevsky. Gogol's famous tale, "The Overcoat," has been the inspiration, the model, and often the despair of his successors; it has that curious mingling of realism with fantasy so characteristic of the Russian method and manner.

The chief living writers of fiction in Russia to-day are Kuprin, Andreyev, Gorky, Korolenko, Sologub, Bunin, and Artsybashev. Fortunately, the works of these authors are rapidly becoming accessible in English translations, so that there is no longer any excuse for American ignorance. The New York *Russian Review*, edited by my friend who is the translator of the tales in this volume, gives us all an excellent opportunity to become acquainted with contemporary Russian thought in both art and politics. It was in the pages of this periodical that I first read Kuprin's beautiful dream, "The Garden of the Holy Virgin."

Partly owing to the war, partly owing to the reaction that invariably follows a surprise, there is some danger that the former Anglo-Saxon indifference to Russian fiction will change into an almost equally stupid idolatry. A novel is not great simply because it is written in the Russian language, nor because its author has a name difficult to pronounce. A slavish —no pun intended—adoration of Russian novels is not in itself an indication of critical intelligence. And a vast deal of nonsense has been gushed over the "Slavonic soul." The Slavonic soul, as revealed in the masterpieces, is impressive because it is poignantly human, not because it is superhuman, subhuman, or inhuman.

I find that the modern Russian writers can be just as sensational, just as exaggerative, just as cheap, and just as dull as if they had been born in America. It should be the task of the translators not to hurry anything and everything Russian through the press, but to exercise the happy talent of selection and discrimination. Nor should there be any exploiting of mere horror or sensuality. A pessimist is not necessarily a profound thinker, nor is uncleanness in itself a sign of virility. Emerson and Browning had at once more depth and more force than Artsybashev.

Kuprin, like his contemporaries, is a decidedly unequal writer; he soars and he sinks. His range extends from "The Garden of the Holy Virgin" to "The Pit." He is holy and he is coarse, he is sublime and he is flat. Among his full-length novels may be found the dreamily sentimental, forceless "Olessia," and the immensely powerful masterpiece, "The Duel."

Every American lover of militarism—and we have thousands of them—ought to read "The Duel." Kuprin was at one time an officer in the Russian army, and making due allowance for exaggeration and overemphasis, he apparently knows what he is talking about. Kuprin hates war as only a truly civilized man can hate it; and I wish that those ministers of the gospel who loudly assert that war and military training are purifying and ennobling forces would read this novel. Garrison life, official tyranny, and military conscription are revealed in a strong light—the light, not of sentimentalism, but of truth. Here is the way the Russian officers are portrayed. "At home

they are splendid fathers of families and excellent husbands; but as soon as they approach the barracks they become low-minded, cowardly, and idiotic barbarians. You ask me why this is, and I answer: Because nobody can find a grain of sense in what is called military service. You know how all children like to play at war. Well, the human race has had its childhood—a time of incessant and bloody war; but war was not then one of the scourges of mankind, but a continued, savage, exultant national feast to which daring bands of youths marched forth, meeting victory or death with joy and pleasure. . . . Mankind, however, grew in age and wisdom; people got weary of the former rowdy, bloody games, and became more serious, thoughtful, and cautious. The old Vikings of song and saga were designated and treated as pirates. The soldier no longer regarded war as a bloody but enjoyable occupation, and had often to be dragged to the enemy with a noose round his neck. . . . Military discipline still exists, but it is based on threats and dread, and undermined by a dull, mutual hatred. . . . And all this abomination is carefully hidden under a close veil of tinsel and finery, and foolish, empty ceremonies, in all ages the charlatan's *conditio sine qua non.*"

Kuprin's short stories vary so greatly in value and significance that I regard it as particularly fortunate that this volume is made up of specimens selected and translated by a Russian living in New York. Mr. Leo Pasvolsky understands the original as no native American could possibly do; and his residence in our country

makes him peculiarly fitted to judge what stories are best fitted for our admiration and comprehension. He has made an excellent choice, naturally sacrificing some things to obtain range and variety.

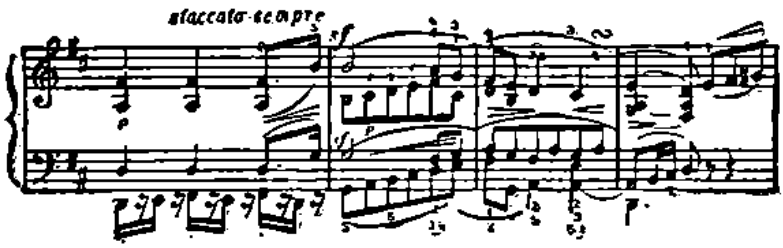
It is a happy chance that this book appears in the year of the Russian Revolution, which, whatever its ultimate results may be, has stirred the hearts of the whole world. It is an event of even greater significance than the war itself, and more important—so far as we can see—than the outcome of the international fight. We may have to revise our opinion of what Sienkiewicz called *slave improductivité*. And may we not hope that this Revolution is a real step forward toward that time of which Kuprin speaks in the closing pages of "The Duel," a time when man shall be really free?

"Ah, a time will come when . . . there shall be no longer slaves and masters; no maimed or cripples; no malice, no vices, no pity, no hate. Men shall be gods. How shall I dare to deceive, insult, or ill-treat another man, in whom I see and feel my fellow, who, like myself, is a god? Then, and then only, shall life be rich and beautiful. . . . Our daily life shall be a pleasurable toil, an enfranchised science, a wonderful music, an everlasting merrymaking. Love, free and sovereign, shall become the world's *religion*."

WM. LYON PHELPS.

YALE UNIVERSITY,
23 March, 1917.

THE BRACELET OF GARNETS



L. van Beethoven, 2 Son. (Op. 2, No. 2)
Largo Appassionato

I

IN the middle of August, just before the birth of the new moon, the weather suddenly took a turn for the worse and assumed that disagreeable character which is sometimes characteristic of the northern coast of the Black Sea. Sometimes a heavy fog would hang drearily over land and sea, and then the immense siren of the lighthouse would howl day and night like a mad bull. Sometimes it would rain from morning to morning, and the thickly falling rain-drops, as fine as dust, would transform the clayey roads and paths into one continuous sheet of mud, in which the passing wagons and carriages stuck for a long time. Sometimes a hurricane-like wind would begin to blow from the steppes lying toward the northwest, and then the tops of the trees would bend down to the ground, and again sweep

up, like waves during a storm; the iron roofs of the country houses would rattle at night, as though some one were walking over them in iron-shod boots, the window-panes would jingle, the doors snap, and the flues howl dismally. Several fishing barks lost their way in the sea, and two of them never returned to shore; it was only a week later that the bodies of the fishermen were washed ashore in different places.

The inhabitants of the shore resort—which lay on the outskirts of a large city—mostly Greeks and Jews, who, like all people of the south, are fond of comforts, hastened to move to the city. And endless lines of wagons, loaded with mattresses, furniture, trunks, wash-stands, samovars, and all kinds of household goods, stretched down the muddy road. Sad and pitiable, and even disgusting, was the sight of this procession, as one caught glimpses of it through the thick net of rain, for everything seemed so old and worn out and sordid. Maids and cooks were sitting on top of the tarpaulins that covered the vans, holding flat-irons, tin boxes, or baskets in their hands; the sweating, almost exhausted horses stopped every little while, their knees shaking, and a cloud of steam rising from their heaving flanks, while the drivers, all covered with rags for protection against the rain, cursed them hoarsely. But even sadder was the sight of the deserted houses, with their suddenly acquired bareness and emptiness, with their mutilated flower-beds, broken window-panes, straying dogs, and piles of refuse consisting of cigarette stumps, pieces of paper, boxes, and medicine-bottles.

But toward the middle of September the weather again changed unexpectedly. The days suddenly became calm and cloudless, bright, warm, and sunny, as they had not been even in July. The fields became dry, and on their yellow bristle glistened the autumn spider-web, like netted mica. The trees were now dropping their yellow leaves, obediently and silently.

Princess Vera Nikolayevna Sheyin, the wife of the president of the local Assembly of the Nobles, could not leave her country house, because the alterations in their city home had not as yet been completed. And now she was happy over the splendid weather that had set in, over the quiet, the fresh air, the chirping of the swallows that were gathering on the telegraph-wires and forming into flocks for their far journey—happy over the gentle, salty breeze slowly coming from the sea.

II

Moreover, that day, September 17, happened to be her birthday. She was always fond of that day, as it was connected with happy childhood recollections, and she always expected something miraculous and fortunate to happen on her birthday. This time, before leaving for the city, where he had an urgent engagement, her husband had put on her night table a little case, containing beautiful earrings with shapely pearl pendants, and this present made her still happier.

She was all alone in the house. Her bachelor brother Nikolay, who was living with them, had also

gone to the city, as he had to appear in court that morning in his capacity of assistant district attorney. Her husband had promised to bring a few intimate friends for dinner. She thought it was well that her birthday came at the time when they were still in their country home. If it had happened in the city, it would have been necessary to provide a formal banquet, while here, on the seashore, a simple dinner would do just as well. Prince Sheyin, despite his prominence in society, or perhaps because of it, had always found it rather difficult to make his financial ends meet. His immense hereditary estate had been reduced almost to the point of bankruptcy by his predecessors, and he was compelled to live beyond his means: to provide entertainments, give to charity, dress well, keep up a good stable. Princess Vera, whose formerly passionate love for her husband had already become transformed into a feeling of lasting, true, sincere friendship, did everything in her power to help her husband ward off financial disaster. Without letting him know, she refused herself many luxuries and economized in her household management as much as she could.

Just now she was in the garden carefully cutting flowers for the dinner-table. The flower-beds were almost empty and presented a disordered appearance. The many-colored double carnations were in their last bloom; the gillyflowers already had half of their blossoms transformed into thin, green pods, that smelled like cabbage; the rose-bushes were blooming for the third time that summer, and their blossoms

and buds were small and far between, as though they were degenerating. Only dahlias, peonies, and asters were coldly and haughtily beautiful in their luxuriant bloom, spreading a sad, grassy, autumnal odor in the air. The other flowers, after their sumptuous love and abundant summer motherhood, were now quietly shedding on the ground the numberless seeds of future life.

The sound of an automobile-horn came from the road. It was Princess Vera's sister, Anna Nikolayevna Friesse, coming to help her with her preparations, as she had promised over the telephone that morning.

Vera's accurate ear did not deceive her. A few moments later, a beautiful car stopped at the gates, and the chauffeur, jumping down from his seat, quickly opened the door.

The sisters greeted each other joyfully. From early childhood they had been warmly and closely attached to each other. They were strangely unlike in appearance. Vera was the older of the two, and she was like her mother, a beautiful Englishwoman; she was tall and slender, with a cold and proud face, beautiful, somewhat large hands, and that charming slope of the shoulders which one sometimes meets in old miniatures. Anna, on the other hand, inherited the Mongolian blood of her father, a Tartar prince, whose forebears had embraced Christianity only at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and whose ancestry could be traced back to Tamerlane himself, or Lang-Temir, as the father was fond of calling in the Tartar dialect that great bloody tyrant. She was

considerably shorter than her sister, rather broad-shouldered, with a lively and light-minded disposition. Her face was of a pronounced Mongolian type, with rather prominent cheek-bones, narrow eyes, which she always screwed up a little because of near-sightedness, with a haughty expression of her small, sensuous mouth, that had a slightly protruding, full lower lip. And yet her face was fascinating with some incomprehensible and elusive charm, which lay perhaps in her smile, perhaps in the deep feminacy of all her features, perhaps in her piquant and coquettish mimicry. Her graceful lack of beauty excited and attracted the attention of men much oftener than her sister's aristocratic beauty.

She had married a very wealthy and very stupid man, who had absolutely nothing to do, but was nominally connected with some charitable institution and had the title of a gentleman of the Emperor's bedchamber. She did not like her husband, and had only two children; after the birth of her second child, she decided to have no more. Vera, on the other hand, was very anxious to have children, and the more the better, as it seemed to her, but she had none, and was extremely fond of her sister's pretty and anæmic children, always polite and obedient, with pale faces and curly, light hair, like that of a doll.

Anna was perfectly happy in her haphazard way of doing things, and she was full of contradictions. She was perfectly willing to engage in most risky flirtations in all the capitals and fashionable resorts of

Europe, but she was never unfaithful to her husband, whom she, nevertheless, jeered contemptuously both in his presence and absence; she was extravagant, inordinately fond of gambling and dancing, of exciting experiences, of visits to suspicious cafés, and yet she was remarkable for her generosity and kindness, and for her deep, sincere piety, which had even led her to embrace secretly the Catholic faith. She had a wonderfully beautiful bosom, neck, and shoulders. When dressing for balls, she bared her neck and shoulders beyond the limits set by both propriety and fashion, but it was whispered that despite her low décolleté, she always wore a hair shirt.

Vera was characterized by stern simplicity, cold and somewhat condescending politeness, independence, and majestic calmness.

III

"Goodness, how beautiful it is here! How beautiful!" Anna was saying this, as she walked rapidly with her sister down the path. "Let us sit on this bench by the precipice for a while, if we may. I haven't seen the sea for such a long time. The air is so exhilarating it makes my heart glad to breathe it. You know, last summer in Crimea, when we were in Miskhora, I made a marvellous discovery. Do you know what is the odor of the water at high tide? Just imagine, it smells like mignonettes!"

Vera smiled affectionately.

"You are a regular dreamer."

"Why, no, no, not at all. I remember once, when I said that there is a pinkish tint in moonlight, everybody laughed at me. And only a few days ago, Boritsky, the artist who is painting my portrait, told me that I was right and that artists have known about it for a long time."

"An artist? Is that your new fad?"

"You always imagine things!" said Anna laughingly, as she rapidly walked up to the brink of the precipice, which was sloping down almost perpendicularly into the sea, glanced over it, and suddenly cried out in horror, jumping away, her face turning pale.

"Goodness, how high it is!" she said in a weak and shaking voice. "When I look down from such a stupendous height, I have such a sweetish and disgusting sensation in my chest. . . . And my toes feel as though they were being pinched. . . . And yet I am drawn, drawn toward it. . . ."

She made a motion as though she were again going to look over the brink of the precipice, but her sister stopped her.

"Anna, dear, please don't do it. I become dizzy myself, when I see you doing it. Won't you, please, sit down?"

"All right, all right, here I am. . . . But just look how beautiful it all is; I can't feast my eyes enough on it. If you only knew how thankful I am to God for having created all these marvels for us!"

The sisters remained thoughtful for a moment. Far, far below, under their feet, spread the calm sea.

The shore was not visible from the spot where they were sitting, and this merely emphasized the feeling of illimitable grandeur, produced by the vast sheet of water before them. And the water was gently quiet, joyfully blue, shining with occasional, oblique bands of smoothness, that marked the currents, and changing its color into a deeper blue near the horizon line.

Fishermen's boats, appearing so small that they were scarcely discernible to the naked eye, seemed plunged in slumber upon the motionless surface of the sea, not far from the shore. And a little farther off, a large, three-mast schooner, covered from top to bottom with white sails monotonously expanded by the wind, seemed to be standing in the air, also motionless.

"I think I understand you," said Vera thoughtfully. "But I feel differently about it. When I see the sea for the first time, after being away for a considerable period, it agitates me and gladdens me and amazes me. It seems to me as though I were beholding for the first time an enormous, majestic miracle. . . . But after a while, when I become used to it, it begins to oppress me with its flat emptiness. . . . I have no more interest in gazing at it, and even try not to look. I simply become tired of it."

Anna smiled.

"Why do you smile?"

"You know, last summer," Anna said mischievously, "a large group of us went on horseback from Yalta to the top of Uch-Kosh, over to the spot above the

waterfalls. At first we struck a cloud; it was awfully damp and we could hardly see ahead, but we were still going up and up a steep path, winding among pine-trees. And then suddenly, the pine forest came to an end and we came out of the fog. Just imagine: a narrow platform on the rock, and under our feet a deep abyss. The villages down there seemed like match-boxes, and woods and gardens like thin blades of grass. Everything before us sloped down to the sea, like a geographic map. And beyond it was the sea, stretching out fifty or a hundred miles before us. It seemed to me as though I were hanging in the air, ready to fly. You get a feeling of such beauty, such lightness! I turned back to our guide and said to him in rapture, 'Isn't it wonderful, Seid-Ogly?' and he just smacked his tongue and said: 'If you only knew, lady, how tired I am of all this. I see it every day.'"

"Thanks for the comparison," said Vera, laughing. "No, but I guess that we northerners can never appreciate the beauties of the sea. I like the woods. Remember the woods in our Yegorovsk? You can never get tired of them. The pines! And the mosses! And the fly-agarics! They look as though they were made of crimson satin and embroidered with tiny white beads. And it is so quiet and cool."

"I don't care; I like everything," answered Anna. "But most of all, I like my dear little sister, my sensible little Vera. We two are alone in the world, aren't we?"

She embraced her sister and pressed her cheek against Vera's. Suddenly she jumped up.

"My, how stupid I am! Here we are, sitting together, as they do in stories, talking about nature, while I've forgotten all about the present I brought you. Here it is—look! I wonder if you'll like it?"

She took out of her bag a little note-book with a wonderful cover. On old blue velvet, already worn off and grown gray with age, was embroidered in dull gold a filigreed design of rare complexity, delicacy, and beauty—evidently a work of love, executed by the skilful hands of a patient artist. The note-book was attached to a gold chain, as thin as a thread, and thin ivory tablets were substituted for the leaves inside.

"Isn't it charming!" exclaimed Vera, kissing her sister. "Thank you ever so much. Where did you get such a treasure?"

"Oh, in an antique shop. You know my weakness for rummaging among all kinds of antiques. And once I came across this prayer-book. See, here is where the design is made in the shape of a cross. Of course, I found only the cover, all the rest, the leaves, the clasps, the pencil, I had to think out myself. But Molliner simply refused to understand what I was trying to tell him. The clasps had to be made the same way as the whole design, of dull, old gold, delicately engraved, and he made this thing of it. But the chain is very ancient, really Venetian."

Vera stroked the beautiful cover affectionately.

"What deep antiquity! How old do you think this book is?" asked she.

"It would be pretty hard to say. Perhaps the end

of the seventeenth century, or the middle of the eighteenth."

"How strange it is," said Vera with a thoughtful smile, "that I am holding in my hands an object which may have been touched by the hands of the Marquise de Pompadour, or even Queen Antoinette herself. . . . Do you know, Anna, you must be the only person in the world who could conceive of the mad idea of making a lady's note-book out of a prayer-book. However, let's go in and see how things are getting on."

They went into the house through the large brick piazza, covered on all sides by thickly interlaced vines of grapes. The abundant bunches of black grapes, that had a faint odor of strawberries, hung down heavily amidst dark-green leaves, goldened in spots by the sun. The whole piazza was filled with greenish twilight, which made the faces of the two women appear pale.

"Will you have the dinner served here?" asked Anna.

"I thought of doing that at first. But it is rather cool in the evening now. I guess we shall use the dining-room, and the men can come out here to smoke."

"Will there be any interesting people?"

"I don't know yet. But I do know that grandpa is coming."

"Grandpa! Isn't that fine!" exclaimed Anna. "It seems to me that I haven't seen him in ages."

"Vasily's sister is coming, and I think Professor Speshnikov. Why, I simply lost my head yesterday, Anna. You know that they both like a good dinner,

grandpa and the professor, and you cannot get anything, either here or in the city. Luka has gotten some quails and is trying to do something with them now. The roast beef we got isn't bad. Alas! the inevitable roast beef. The lobsters, too, are pretty good."

"Well, that isn't bad at all. Don't trouble yourself about that. Still, between us two, you must admit that you like a good dinner yourself."

"And then we'll have something rare. The fisherman brought us a sea-cock this morning. It's a monster."

Anna, interested in everything that concerned her and did not concern her, immediately expressed a desire to see the sea-cock.

The tall, yellow-faced cook, Luka, brought in a large, oval basin of water, holding it carefully so as not to spill the water on the parquet floor.

"Twelve and a half pounds, your Highness," said he with that pride which is so characteristic of cooks. "We weighed him a few minutes ago."

The fish was too large for the basin, and was lying on the bottom, with its tail curled up. Its scales had a golden tint, the fins were of bright-scarlet color, while on either side of the ravenous head was a long, fan-shaped wing of light-blue color. The fish was still alive and was breathing heavily.

Anna touched the head of the fish with her little finger. The animal swept up its tail, and Anna drew her hand away in fright.

"Don't trouble yourself, your Highness," said Luka,

evidently understanding Vera's worry. "Everything will be first class. The Bulgarian has just brought two fine cantaloupes. And then, may I ask of your Highness, what kind of sauce to serve with the fish, Tartar or Polish, or just toast in butter?"

"Do as you like," said the princess.

IV

The guests began to arrive after five o'clock. Prince Vasily Lvovich brought his sister, Ludmila Lvovna Durasova, a stout, kindly, and unusually taciturn woman; a very rich young man, familiarly known in society as Vasuchok, who was famous for his ability to sing, recite poetry, organize charity balls and entertainments; the famous pianist, Jennie Reiter, Princess Vera's school friend; and Vera's brother, Nikolay Nikolayevich. Then came Anna's husband in his automobile, bringing with him the clean-shaven, fat Professor Speshnikov, and the Vice-Governor Von Zeck. The last one to arrive was General Anosov, in a fine hired landau, accompanied by two army officers, Ponomarev, a colonel of the staff, and Lieutenant Bakhtinsky, who was famous in Petersburg as a splendid dancer and cotillon leader.

General Anosov was a stout, tall old man with silver hair. He alighted heavily from his carriage, holding on to it with both hands. Usually he had an ear-tube in his left hand and a walking-stick with a rubber head in the right. He had a large, coarse, red face, with a prominent nose and that kindly, majestic, just

a little contemptuous expression in his slightly screwed-up eyes, which is characteristic of brave and simple men, who had often seen mortal danger immediately before their eyes. The two sisters, recognizing him at a distance, ran to the carriage just in time to support him by both arms half in jest and half seriously.

"Just like an . . . archbishop," said the general in a kindly, hoarse bass.

"Grandpa, grandpa," said Vera in a tone of light reproach, "we wait for you every day almost, and you never show yourself."

"Grandpa must have lost all conscience down here in the south," continued Anna. "Might at least have remembered his goddaughter. Shame on you! You behave like a regular Don Juan, and have forgotten entirely about our existence."

The general, baring his majestic head, kissed their hands, then kissed their cheeks, and then their hands again.

"Wait, wait . . . girls . . . don't scold me," he said, alternating his words with deep sighs, resulting from habitual short breathing. "My word of honor . . . those good-for-nothing doctors . . . bathed my rheumatisms . . . all summer . . . in some kind of . . . jelly. . . . Smells awfully. . . . And wouldn't let me go. . . . You are the first. . . . Ever so glad . . . to see you. . . . How are you? . . . You've become . . . an English lady . . . Vera . . . you look so much . . . like your mother. . . . When are we going to have . . . the christening?"

"Never, I am afraid, grandpa."

"Don't despair. . . . Pray to God. . . . And you haven't changed a bit, Anna. . . . I guess when you are sixty . . . you'll still be the same prattler. Wait a moment. Let me introduce the officers to you."

"I had the honor long ago," said Colonel Ponomarev, bowing.

"I was introduced to the princess in Petersburg," said the hussar.

"Well, then let me introduce to you, Anna, Lieutenant Bakhtinsky, a fine dancer, a good scrapper, and a first-class cavalryman. Will you get that parcel out of the carriage, Bakhtinsky, please? Well, let's go now. . . . What'll you give us to-night, Vera? I tell you, after that treatment . . . I have an appetite . . . like a graduating ensign."

General Anosov was a war comrade and loyal friend of the late Prince Mirza-Bulat-Tuganovsky. After the prince's death he transferred all his friendship and affection to the two daughters. He had known them since their early childhood, and was Anna's godfather. At that time, just as at the time of the story, he was the commandant of the large though almost useless Fortress K., and visited the Tuganovsky house almost every day. The children simply adored him for his presents, for the theatre and circus tickets that he used to get for them, and for the fact that nobody could play with them as the old general did. But his greatest fascination lay in the stories that he told them. For hours at a time, he would tell them of marches and battles, victories and defeats, and death and wounds, and bitter cold; they were slow, simple stories,

epic-like in their calm, told between the evening tea and the dreary time when the children would be taken to bed.

According to modern ideas, this fragment of the old days was really a gigantic and picturesque figure. In him were brought together those touching and deep characteristics which are more commonly met with among plain soldiers, and not officers—those unadulterated characteristics of a Russian peasant, which, in proper combination, produce that lofty type which often makes our soldier not only unconquerable, but a martyr, almost a saint—those characteristics of unsophisticated, naïve faith, a clear, joyful view of life, cool courage, meekness before the face of death, pity for the conquered, boundless patience, and remarkable physical and moral endurance.

Starting with the Polish campaign, Anosov took part in every war except the one against the Japanese. He would have gone to that war, too, but he was not summoned, and he had a rule, really great in its modesty, which was as follows: "Do not tempt death until you are called upon to do so." During his whole military career, he not only never had a soldier flogged, but never even struck one. During the Polish uprising he refused to shoot some prisoners, although he was ordered to do so by the commander of the regiment. "When it comes to a spy," he said, "I would not only have him shot, but, if you will order me, I shall kill him myself. But these are prisoners of war; I can't do it." And he said this with such simplicity, so respectfully, without a trace of a challenge, looking

his superior straight in the face with his clear eyes, that he was let alone, instead of being himself ordered shot for insubordination.

During the war of 1877–9, he quickly reached the colonel's rank, although he had received no education, having been graduated, in his own words, from the "bears' academy." He took part in the crossing of the Danube, went through the Balkans, took part in the defense of Shipka, and the last attack on Plevna. During this campaign he received one serious wound and four slighter ones, besides receiving serious head lacerations through being struck by the fragment of a grenade. Generals Radetzky and Skobelev knew him personally and treated him with singular respect. It was about him that Skobelev said: "I know an officer who is much braver than I am; it is Major Anosov."

He returned from the war almost deaf, thanks to the head lacerations, with an injured foot—three of the toes were frozen during the crossing of the Balkans and had to be amputated—with severe rheumatism—the results of his service at Shipka. After two years had passed, it was decided that he should leave active service, but Anosov did not wish to leave. The commander of the district, who still remembered his remarkable bravery displayed during the crossing of the Danube, helped him, and the authorities in Petersburg changed their minds, fearing to hurt the old colonel's feelings. He was given for life the position of commandant of the Fortress K., which was, as a matter of fact, merely an honorary post.

Everybody in the city knew him and made fun, in a kindly way, of his weaknesses, his habits, and his manner of dressing. He always went about unarmed, in an old-fashioned coat, a cap with large rims and huge straight visor, a walking-stick in his right hand, and an ear-horn in the left; he was always accompanied by two fat, lazy dogs, the tips of whose tongues were forever between their teeth. If, during his morning walks he happened to meet his acquaintances, the passers-by would hear blocks away the general's loud voice and the barking of his dogs.

Like many deaf people, he was very fond of the opera, and sometimes, in the course of a love duet, the whole theatre would hear his loud bass, saying: "Didn't he take that *do* clear, the devil take him? Just like cracking a nut." And the whole theatre would restrain its laughter, while the general himself would be entirely unconscious of the whole thing; he would be sure that he had whispered his opinion to his neighbor.

As the commandant of the fortress, he often visited the guard-house, accompanied by his loudly breathing dogs. There, spending their time rather pleasantly in playing cards, sipping tea, and telling anecdotes, the imprisoned officers rested from the strenuous duties of army life. He would ask each one attentively for his name, the cause of his arrest, by whom ordered, and the period of time to be spent in confinement. Sometimes he would suddenly praise an officer for a brave, though illegal, act; at other times he would suddenly fall to scolding an officer and his voice would

be heard far into the street. But the scolding over, he would always make it a point to inquire where the officer gets his meals and how much he pays for them. And if some poor sublieutenant, sent over from some out-of-the-way place for a long period of imprisonment, would admit to him that because of lack of means he was compelled to eat the soldiers' fare, Anosov would immediately order meals brought to him from the commandant's house, which was not more than two hundred steps away from the guard-house.

It was at K. that he had met the family of Prince Tuganovsky and become so attached to the children that it became a matter of necessity with him to visit them every evening. If it happened sometimes that the young ladies would go somewhere in the evening, or that official duties would keep him in the fortress, he would feel actual distress and find no place for himself in the spacious rooms of his large house. Every summer, he would take a leave of absence and spend a whole month in Yegorovsk, the Tuganovsky estate, which was a distance of fifty versts from K.

All the hidden kindness of his soul and his necessity for heartfelt affection he transferred to these children, especially the girls. He himself had married once, but it was so very long ago that he had forgotten about it. Even before the war, his wife had eloped with a travelling actor, charmed by his velvet cloak and his lace cuffs. The general supported her until her death, but never permitted her to enter his house,

despite her numerous attempts at reconciliation and her tearful letters to him. They never had any children.

V

The evening turned out to be quite warm and calm, so that the candles both in the dining-room and on the piazza were giving steady light. At dinner, it was Prince Vasily Lvovich that provided the entertainment. He had a remarkable way of relating stories, really a method all peculiar to himself. The basis of his story would be an actual occurrence, the hero of which would be some one present or well known to those present, but he would change things around in such a way and tell about them with such a serious face and in such a businesslike tone, that the listeners would be kept in constant laughter. That night he was telling the story of Nikolay Nikolayevich's unsuccessful courtship for a very beautiful and very rich lady. The truth of the story was that the husband of the lady had refused to divorce her. But in the prince's narrative, the truth was marvellously blended with the fantastic. In the story, the serious and somewhat haughty Nikolay was made to run through the streets at night in his stockinged feet and his shoes under his arm. A policeman stopped the young man somewhere on the corner and it was only after a long and stormy explanation that Nikolay finally succeeded in proving to the officer of the law that he was the assistant district attorney and not a burglar. The marriage, according to the story, came very

near being successfully consummated, but in the very critical moment, a band of perjurers, who were taking part in the case, went on strike, demanding an increase in wages. Both because he was miserly (Nikolay was in reality a little close-fisted) and because, as a matter of principle, he was opposed to all kinds of strikes, he refused to grant the increase, citing a definite statute confirmed by the verdict of the appellate division. Then the infuriated perjurers, in reply to the customary question, as to whether any one knows any reasons why the marriage should not take place, answered in chorus: "We know. Everything that we have deposed under oath is false, and we were forced by the district attorney to tell these lies. As for the husband of this lady, we, as persons well informed about these matters, can say that he is the most respectable man in the world, as chaste as Joseph, and of most angelic kindness."

Continuing on the road of bridal stories, Prince Vasily did not spare Gustav Ivanovich Friesse, either. He told the story of how Anna's husband, on the day following the marriage ceremony, demanded police aid in forcing his bride to leave her parents' home, as she did not have a passport of her own, and compelling her to move to the domicile of her legal husband. The only thing that was true in this anecdote was that, during the first few days of her married life, Anna was compelled to stay with her mother, who was suddenly taken ill, while Vera had to leave for her own home in the south, and during this whole time, Gustav Ivanovich was full of distress and despair.

Everybody laughed. Anna, too, smiled. Gustav Ivanovich laughed louder than anybody else, and his thin face, tightly covered with glistening skin, with his carefully brushed, thin, light hair, and deeply sunk eye-sockets, reminded one of a bare skull, displaying two rows of decayed teeth. He was still enchanted by Anna, just as on the first day of their married life, always tried to sit next to her, to touch her, and looked after her with such an amorous and self-satisfied expression, that one often felt sorry and ill at ease to look at him.

Just before rising from the table, Vera Nikolayevna counted the guests, without really meaning to do it. There were thirteen. She was superstitious, and thought to herself: "Now, that's bad. How is it that I never thought of it before? And it's all Vasya's fault; he didn't tell me anything over the telephone."

Whenever friends met either at the Sheyins' or at the Friesses', it was customary to play poker, as both sisters were very fond of games of chance. Special rules were even worked out in both homes. Each player was given a certain number of bone counters, and the game continued until all the counters fell into one person's hands. After that the game automatically came to a close, despite all the protestations of the players. It was forbidden to take additional counters. These stern rules were the result of actual practice, as neither of the sisters knew any bounds in games of chance. In this way, the total loss never aggregated to more than one or two hundred roubles.

A game of poker was organized for that evening, too. Vera, who took no part in it, started to go out to the piazza, where the tea-table was being set, when she was stopped by her maid, who asked her with a somewhat mysterious expression to go with her to the little room adjoining the parlor.

"What is it, Dasha?" asked Princess Vera with displeasure. "Why do you look so stupid? And what is it that you have in your hands?"

Dasha placed a small square parcel on the table. It was carefully wrapped up in white paper and bound with pink ribbon.

"It isn't my fault, your Highness," said she, blushing at the scolding. "He came and said . . ."

"Who came?"

"The fellow in the red cap, your Highness. The messenger."

"Well?"

"He came to the kitchen and put this on the table. 'Give this to your lady,' says he, 'and to nobody but herself.' And when I asked him whom it is from, he says, 'Everything is marked there.' And with that he ran away."

"Send somebody after him."

"We can't do it now, your Highness; he was here a half-hour ago, during the dinner, only I didn't dare to trouble your Highness."

"All right. You may go."

She cut the ribbon with a pair of scissors and threw it into the basket together with the wrapper, upon which her address was written. The parcel proved

to be a small case of red velvet, coming evidently from a jewelry store. Vera raised the top lined with light-blue silk and found inside an oval gold bracelet, under which was lying a note prettily folded into an eight-cornered figure. She quickly unfolded the paper. The handwriting seemed familiar to her, but, like a real woman, she pushed the note aside and began to examine the bracelet.

It was made of rather base gold and, while very thick, was evidently empty inside. The whole outer rim was studded with small, old garnets, rather poorly polished. But in the centre of the rim there was a small, peculiar-looking, green stone, surrounded by five beautiful, large garnets, each as large as a pea. When Vera accidentally turned the bracelet so that the five large garnets came under the light of the electric lamp, five crimson lights suddenly flared up before her eyes.

"Like blood!" thought she involuntarily, with a sudden, unexpected alarm.

Then she thought of the letter and opened it again. She read the following lines, written in a beautiful, small hand:

"YOUR HIGHNESS, PRINCESS VERA NIKOLAYEVNA:

"I take the courage to send you my modest gift, together with my most respectful congratulations upon this joyous and bright occasion of your birthday."

"Oh, it's the same man again," thought the princess with displeasure. Still, she finished the letter:

"I should never had dared to send you as a gift anything chosen by myself, as I have neither the

right nor the taste, nor—I admit—the money for this. Moreover, I am sure that there is not a treasure in the world which would be worthy of adorning you.

"But this bracelet was the property of my great-grandmother and was worn last by my late mother. In the middle, among the large stones, you will see a green one. This is a very rare kind of garnet, a green garnet. According to an old tradition, still believed in by our family, it has the property of rendering prophetic the women who carry it and driving away all their painful thoughts, while with men it is a talisman that protects them from violent death.

"All the stones have been carefully transferred from the old silver bracelet, and you may be certain that no one before you had ever worn this bracelet.

"You may immediately throw away this ludicrous toy, or give it to somebody, but I will still be happy when thinking of the fact that your hands touched it.

"I beg you not to be angry with me. I blush at the recollection of the insolence which led me, seven years ago, to write you foolish and wild letters and even to expect you to reply to them. Now nothing remains in me but reverence, eternal devotion, and slavish loyalty. Now I can only wish for your happiness every minute of my life, and to be joyful in the knowledge of your happiness. In my thoughts I bow to the ground before the chairs on which you sit, the floor on which you walk, the trees which you touch, the maid with whom you speak. I do not even envy either human beings or inanimate things.

"Once more I beg your forgiveness for having troubled you with this long and unnecessary letter.

"Your obedient servant, unto death and beyond the grave, G. S. Z."

"I wonder if I ought to show this to Vasya? And if I ought to, would it be better to do it now, or after everybody is gone? No, I guess I'll wait until everybody is gone; if I do it now, not only this unfortunate fellow will appear ridiculous, but I also."

So thought Princess Vera as she gazed upon the five crimson lights trembling beneath the surface of the five garnets, unable to turn her gaze away.

VI

It took some time to convince Colonel Ponomarev that he ought to play poker. He said that he did not know the game, that he did not believe in playing games of chance even for fun, that the only games he played with any degree of success were of the milder varieties. Still, he gave in in the end and agreed to learn.

At first he had to be shown every little thing, but it did not take him long to master the rules of poker, and at the end of less than half an hour, all the counters were already in his hands.

"You can't do that!" said Anna with comical displeasure. "Why didn't you give us a chance to have a little fun at least?"

Three of the guests, Speshnikov, the colonel, and

the vice-governor, a rather stupid and uninteresting German, really couldn't find anything to do, and Vera was at a loss to provide some kind of entertainment for them. At last she succeeded in getting them to play cards, inviting Gustav Ivanovich to be the fourth partner. Anna looked at her sister and, as if in sign of her gratitude, she lowered her long lashes, and the sister immediately understood her. Everybody knew that if Gustav Ivanovich were not made to play cards, he would keep close to his wife's side all the time, really spoiling the evening for her.

Now everything ran smoothly and interestingly. Vasuchok was singing popular Italian songs and Rubinstein's *Eastern Melodies*, accompanied by Jennie Reiter. His voice was not very strong, but it was pleasant and well trained. Jennie Reiter, who was a fine musician herself, was always glad to accompany him. Moreover, it was whispered that Vasuchok was in love with her.

In the corner Anna was flirting with the hussar. Vera walked over to them and began to listen to their conversation with a smile.

"Now, now, please don't make fun of me," Anna was saying, smiling with her pretty, Tartar eyes. "Of course, you consider it hard work to gallop in front of your squadron as though you were mad, or to take part in horse-races. But just look at what we have to do. It was only a few days ago that we finally got through with the lottery. You think that was easy, don't you? My goodness, there was such a crowd there and everybody was smoking and annoying

me with all sorts of complaints. . . . And I had to be on my feet the whole day long. And then there is going to be a charity concert for the relief of poor working women, and then a ball. . . ."

"At which, I hope, you will not refuse to dance the mazurka with me?" said Bakhtinsky, jingling his spurs under the chair.

"Thanks. . . . But my main trouble is our asylum, the asylum for depraved children, you know."

"Oh, yes, I know. It must be awfully funny?"

"Stop it, aren't you ashamed of yourself, to make fun of such things? But do you know what our main trouble is? We want to take care of these unfortunate children, whose souls are full of hereditary vices and evil examples, we want to take care of them. . . ."

"Hm!"

". . . to raise their morality, to awaken in their souls the realization of their duties. Do you understand that? Well, every day hundreds and thousands of children are brought to us, and there is not a single depraved child among them! And if we ask the parents whether their child is depraved or not, why, they even get insulted. And there you are, the asylum is all equipped, everything is ready, and not a single inmate. Why, it looks as though we would have to offer a premium for every depraved child brought to us."

"Anna Nikolayevna," said the hussar in a serious, though almost insinuating, tone, "why offer the prize? Take me. Upon my word you won't be able to find a more depraved child than myself."

"Oh, stop that! You can't speak seriously about anything," laughed she, throwing herself back in the chair.

Prince Vasily Lvovich, sitting at a large, round table, was showing his sister, Anosov, and his brother-in-law an album of comical pictures drawn by himself. The four were laughing heartily over the album and this gradually attracted the other guests who were not busy with card-playing.

The album served as a sort of supplement to the satirical stories told by Prince Vasily. With his usual calmness, he was showing for example, "The History of the Love Affairs of the Great General Anosov, Perpetrated in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Other Countries"; or else, "The Adventures of Prince Nikolay-Bulat-Tuganovsky in Monte Carlo," etc.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, you will see the brief life story of our beloved sister, Ludmila Lvovna," said he, glancing quickly at his sister. "Part One. Childhood. 'The child grew, and it was called Lima.'"

On the sheet of the album was drawn the figure of a small girl with her face in profile, yet showing two eyes, with broken lines for her legs and long, extended fingers on her hands.

"Nobody ever called me Lima," laughed Ludmila Lvovna.

"Part Two. Her First Love. A cadet presents the maiden with poetry of his own creation. He is seen kneeling before her. The poetry contains real gems. Here is an example:

"'Your foot, so beautiful and dainty—
A sign of passion sent from Heaven!'

"And here is an actual representation of the foot.

"And in this picture the cadet induces the innocent Lima to elope with him. This is the elopement. And this is the critical situation; the enraged father catches up with the elopers. The cadet, through cowardice, blames everything on poor Lima, in the following lines:

> "'You spent an extra hour with rouge and powder,
> And now the pursuers are upon us.
> Do anything you like, get yourself out of the scrape,
> I run away into the nearest bushes.'"

The life story of Lima was followed by a new story, entitled, "Princess Vera and the Enamoured Telegraphist."

"This touching poem has only been illustrated with pen and ink, and in colors," explained Vasily Lvovich seriously. "The text has not been prepared as yet."

"That's something new," remarked Anosov. "I've never seen this before."

"The latest news. Just out on the market."

Vera touched his arm.

"Do not show it," said she.

But Vasily Lvovich either did not hear her, or did not pay attention to her words.

"The beginning of this story runs back into times prehistoric. One beautiful day in May, a maiden by the name of Vera received a letter with two kissing pigeons at the top of the sheet. This is the letter and these are the pigeons.

"The letter contained a declaration of love, written with absolute defiance of all rules of spelling. It

begins like this, 'Oh, beautiful blonde lady, you, who . . . raging sea of flame seething within my bosom. . . . Your glance, like a poisonous snake, has pierced my suffering soul. . . .' At the end of the letter, there was the following modest signature: 'According to my branch of service, I am only a poor telegraphist, but my feelings are worthy of the great Lord George. I dare not disclose my full name, as it is not fit to be pronounced. Therefore I sign this with my initials only, viz. P. P. Z. Please address your reply to General Delivery.' And here, ladies and gentlemen, you can behold the picture of the telegraphist himself, very skilfully done in colors.

"Vera's heart is pierced. Here is the heart and here, the arrow. But, being a well-behaved and well-brought-up girl, she showed the letter to her parents and also to her friend to whom she was already engaged, a very handsome young man by the name of Vasya Sheyin. This is the illustration. At some future time it will be accompanied by explanation in verse.

"Vasya Sheyin weeps with grief and returns Vera her ring. 'I dare not stand in the way of your happiness,' says he, 'but I implore you not to do anything hastily. Think well before you act. My child, you know not life, and like a butterfly you are flying into the flames. While I, alas! I know well the cold and hypocritical world! Let me warn you that telegraphists are fascinating but crafty. They find inexpressible joy in deceiving their inexperienced victim with their proud beauty and false feelings, and then mocking her most cruelly.'

"Six months go by. In the midst of life's tempestuous dance, Vera forgets her admirer and is married to handsome young Vasya, but the telegraphist does not forget her. He disguises himself as a flue cleaner and makes his way to Princess Vera's room. You can still see the traces of his five fingers and two lips on the carpets, the cushions, the wall-paper, and even the parquet floor.

"Then he disguises himself as a peasant woman and is hired as a dish-washer. But the excessive attentions of our cook make him flee.

"Now he is in the lunatic asylum. And now he enters the monastery. But every day, without fail, he sends passionate letters to Vera. And you can still see the blots on the parts of the sheets where his tears fell.

"Finally he dies and before his death wills to Vera two brass buttons torn off his coat and a perfume bottle filled with his tears. . . ."

"Who wants tea?" asked Vera Nikolayevna.

VII

The autumn sun had already set. The last red, thin band of light that was still burning on the horizon line between the dark cloud and the earth disappeared at last. Neither the earth, nor the trees, nor the sky were visible any more. Only the large stars overhead twinkled, and a bluish beam of light rose upward from the lighthouse and spread out into a circle of dull light, as though breaking against the dome of the

sky. The night butterflies were flying around the glass covers of the candles. The star-shaped white flowers in the garden had a stronger odor in the midst of the darkness and coolness.

Speshnikov, the vice-governor, and Colonel Ponamarev had left some time ago and promised to send the carriage back from the station to take the commandant over. The remaining guests sat on the piazza. Despite his protests, the general was compelled to put on an overcoat and to agree to have his feet covered with a rug. A bottle of his favorite red *Pommard* wine was standing before him, while the two sisters were sitting by his side, filling his glass with the old wine, slicing the cheese for him, and striking matches to light his cigar. The old commandant was completely happy.

"Y-yes. . . . Autumn is here, all right," he was saying, gazing at the candle flame and thoughtfully shaking his head. "It's time for me to get back. And I must say, I don't feel like going. Now is the best time to live at the seashore, in quiet and calm. . . ."

"Why don't you stay with us, grandpa?" said Vera.

"Can't do it, my dear, can't do it. Service won't let me. My furlough is over. . . . How I should like to stay here, though! The roses have such a fine odor now. In summer only the acacia has any odor, and it smells more like candy."

Vera took two small roses out of a vase and inserted them into the buttonhole of the general's coat.

"Thank you, Vera." Anosov bent his head, smelled

the flowers, and then smiled with that fine smile of his.

"This reminds me of how we came to Bukharest. Once I was walking in the street, when a very strong odor of roses stopped me. In front of me were two soldiers holding a beautiful cut-glass bottle of rose oil. They had already rubbed their boots with it and oiled their rifle locks. 'What have you got there?' I asked them. 'Some kind of oil, your Honor. We tried to use it in cooking, but it doesn't work. And it smells fine!' I gave them a rouble, and they were very glad to part with the bottle. Although the bottle was no more than half full, the way prices stood then, the oil was worth at least sixty roubles. The soldiers, greatly pleased with the bargain, added: 'And here is some kind of Turkish peas, your Honor. We tried to cook them but they are as hard as before.' It was coffee. I said to them: 'This is good only for the Turks, it will never do for our soldiers!' It was luck that they didn't eat any opium. I saw opium tablets in several places."

"Grandpa, tell me frankly," said Anna, "were you ever afraid during battles?"

"That's a funny question to ask, Anna. Of course I was afraid. Don't you believe the people who tell you that they are not afraid and that the whistle of bullets is the sweetest music in the world to them. A man like that is either crazy or else he is boasting. Everybody is afraid. Only one fellow will lose all self-control, and another holds himself well in hand. You see, the fear always remains the same, but the

ability to hold yourself in hand develops with practice; that's why we have heroes and great men. And yet, there was one occasion when I was almost frightened to death."

"Won't you tell us about it, grandpa?" asked both sisters together. They were still fond of listening to Anosov's stories, just as they had been in early childhood. Anna even placed her elbows on the table and rested her chin on the palms of her hands, just as she had done when she was a child. There was a peculiar charm in his slow and artless manner of narrating. Even the phraseology with which he narrated his reminiscences often assumed a peculiarly awkward, somewhat bookish character. Sometimes it seemed that he had learned a story in some dear old volume.

"It isn't a long story," said Anosov. "It was in winter, at Shipka, after I was wounded in the head. There were four of us living in a dugout, and it was there that a peculiar thing happened to me. One morning, as I was getting up, it suddenly appeared to me that my name was not Yakov but Nikolay, and I could not possibly convince myself of the fact that it was Yakov. I realized that I was losing my senses and cried for some water, with which I moistened my head, and that brought me back to myself."

"I can just imagine how many conquests you made among the women there, Yakov Mikhailovich," said Jennie Reiter. "You must have been very handsome in your youth."

"Oh, our grandpa is still handsome!" exclaimed Anna.

"No, I guess I never was very handsome," said Anosov, with a quiet smile. "But I was never disliked, overmuch, either. A rather touching incident occurred in Bukharest. When we entered the city, the inhabitants met us with salutes of cannon from the public square, which damaged many window-panes. But the windows, on whose sills stood glasses of water, were not damaged. And this is how I found it out. When I came to the house to which I was billeted, I saw a small cage over which stood a large cut-glass bottle, filled with water. There were fishes swimming in the water, and among them sat a canary. That astonished me. But when I looked closely, I saw that the bottom of the bottle was so blown that it formed an arched space over the open top of the cage, and the canary could fly in and sit on a perch. Afterward I admitted to myself that I was rather slow in grasping things.

"I went into the house and saw a beautiful little Bulgarian girl. I showed her my card, and asked her, by the way, why their window-panes were not broken. She said that it was on account of the water, and explained to me about the canary, too. That's how slow I was! Well, during our conversation, our eyes met, and a spark passed between us, just like electricity, and I felt I had fallen in love with her, ardently and irrecoverably."

The old man became silent for a moment, and slowly sipped the dark wine.

"But you told her of your love, didn't you?" asked the pianist.

"Hm. . . . Of course. . . . But without . . . words. . . . This is how it happened. . . ."

"Grandpa, I hope you won't make us blush?" said Anna with a mischievous smile.

"No, no. It is a very decent story. You see, wherever we came the inhabitants of the cities were not equally cordial and responsive. But in Bukharest, they treated us so well that when I started playing the violin once, the girls began to dance, and we repeated this every day.

"One evening, when we were dancing in the moonlight, I went into the hall, and my Bulgarian girl was there. When she saw me, she pretended that she was sorting dry rose-leaves, whole sacks of which were gathered there. But I embraced her and kissed her several times.

"Well, every time the moon and stars appeared in the sky, I hastened to my beloved and with her forgot all my troubles. And when I had to leave, we swore eternal love, and parted forever."

"Is that all?" asked Ludmila Lvovna, plainly disappointed.

"What more would you want?" replied the commandant.

"You will excuse me, Yakov Mikhailovich, but that was not love; only an ordinary military adventure."

"Don't know, my dear, don't know whether that was love, or some other feeling. . . ."

"But now, tell me, didn't you ever love with real, true love? You know, love which is . . . well, holy,

pure, eternal, heavenly. . . . Didn't you ever love that way?"

"I really don't know what to say," answered the old man hesitatingly, rising from his chair. "I guess I never did love that way. At first, I had no time: youth, cards, wine, the war. . . . It seemed that there would never be an end to life, youth, and health. But before I had time to turn around, I was already a wreck. . . . And now, Vera, don't keep me any longer. Hussar," said he, turning to Bakhtinsky, "the night is warm. Let's walk a little way; we'll meet the carriage."

"I'll go with you, grandpa," said Vera.

"And I, too," added Anna.

Before they went away, Vera said to her husband, in a low voice:

"Go up to my room. There is a red case in the drawer of the table, and a note inside. Read it."

VIII

Anna and Bakhtinsky walked ahead, while the commandant and Vera followed, arm in arm, about twenty paces behind. The night was so black that during the first few minutes, before the eyes became accustomed to the darkness after the light of the rooms, it was necessary to feel for the road with the foot. Anosov, who, despite his age, still had very sharp eyes, had to help his companion every little while. From time to time, with his large, cold hand, he stroked affectionately Vera's hand, that lay lightly on the bend of his overcoat sleeve.

"Isn't Ludmila Lvovna queer?" suddenly said the general, as if continuing his thought aloud. "I have often noticed that when a woman is fifty, and especially if she is a widow or an old maid, she always likes to make fun of other people's love. Either she is spying, or gossiping, or rejoicing at other people's misfortunes, or trying to make others happy, or spreading verbal glue about the higher love. And I say that in our times people don't know how to love. I don't see any real love. Didn't see any in my time, either."

"Now, now, grandpa," Vera retorted softly, pressing his hand a little, "why slander yourself? You were married, too. That means that you were in love, doesn't it?"

"Doesn't mean anything of the sort, Vera. Do you know how I got married? I saw her, such a fresh, naïve girl, you know. And when she breathed, her bosom rose and fell under her waist. She would lower her long, long eyelashes, and suddenly blush. And her skin was so delicate and white, and her hands so warm and soft. Oh, the devil! And papa and mamma walk around, looking at you with such dog-like eyes. And when you'd go away, she'd kiss you just once or twice behind the door. And at tea, her foot would touch yours, as though by accident. . . . Well, the thing was done. . . . 'My dear Nikita Antonych, I came to ask you for your daughter's hand. Believe me, she is a saint and . . .' And papa's eyes are already wet, and he is ready to kiss me. 'My dear boy, we have been expecting it for a long time. . . .

God bless you. . . . Take good care of your treasure. . . .' Well, three months after the wedding, the 'sainted treasure' was already running about the house in a dirty kimono, with slippers on her bare feet, with her thin, uncombed hair all in curl-paper, flirting with servants like a cook, making faces at young officers, talking to them in a strange way, rolling her eyes. In the presence of others, she would insist on calling me 'Jacque,' and pronouncing the word with a funny nasal sound. And she was so extravagant, and greedy, and dirty, and false. And I knew that she was always lying with her eyes. . . . Now it is all over, and I can talk about it calmly. In my heart, I am even thankful to that actor. . . . Thank God, there were no children. . . ."

"But you forgave them, grandpa, didn't you?"

"Forgave? No, that's not the word, Vera. At first I was like mad. If I had met them then, I would have killed them both, of course. And then, by and by, I calmed down, and nothing remained but contempt. And it was well. God spared me unnecessary bloodshed. And besides, I escaped the usual lot of husbands. What would I have been if it were not for this disgusting business? A beast of burden, a shameful conniver, a cow to be milked, a screen, a convenient piece of household goods. . . . No! It was better that way, Vera."

"No, no, grandpa. You will forgive me, but I think that it is your outraged feelings that still speak in you. . . . You transfer your unfortunate experience to the rest of mankind. Take Vasya and me, for

instance. You would not call our married life unfortunate, would you?"

Anosov was silent for a long time. Then he said slowly, almost unwillingly:

"Well . . . let us say . . . that you are an exception. . . . But look, why do most people marry? Take a woman. She is ashamed of remaining an old maid when all her friends are married. She does not want to remain a burden on her family, wants to be independent, to live for herself. . . . And then, of course, there is the purely physiological necessity of motherhood. Men have other motives. In the first place, he is tired of single life, of lack of order in his room, of restaurants, dirt, cigarette-stumps, torn clothes, debts, unceremonious friends, and so on. In the second place, it is better, healthier, and more economical to live a family life. In the third place, he thinks of the possible children, and says to himself: 'I shall die, but a part of me will still remain behind. . . .' Something like the illusion of immortality. Then, again, there is the temptation of innocence, as with me, for instance. Sometimes men think of the dowry. But where is love, disinterested, self-sacrificing, expecting no reward—the love about which it has been said that it is 'more powerful than death'? Where is the love, for which it is joy, and not labor, to make a sacrifice, give up life, suffer pains? Wait, wait, Vera, I know that you are going to tell me about your Vasya. Yes, I like him. He is a good fellow. And, perhaps, in the future, his love will appear in the light of great beauty. But, think of the kind of

love I mean. Love must be a tragedy, the greatest mystery in the world! No life comforts, calculations, or compromises must ever affect it."

"Did you ever see such love, grandpa?" asked Vera quietly.

"No," said the old man decisively. "I do know of two cases somewhat like it, though. Still, one of them was the result of foolishness, and the other . . . of weakness. I'll tell you about them, if you like. It won't take long."

"Please, grandpa."

"Well, the colonel of one of the regiments of our division (not of mine, though) had a wife. The ugliest-looking thing imaginable. Red-haired, and bony, and long, and with a big, big mouth. . . . Plastering used to come from her face, as though it were the wall of an old Moscow residence. You know the kind: temperamental, imperious, full of contempt for everybody, and a passion for variety. A morphine fiend into the bargain.

"Well, once, in the fall, a newly baked ensign was sent to the regiment, a regular yellow-mouthed sparrow just out of a military school. In a month's time, the old mare had him under her thumb. He was her page, and her servant, and her slave; always danced with her, carried her fan and handkerchief, rushed out into the cold to call her carriage. It is an awful thing when a clean-minded and innocent boy lays his first love at the feet of an old, experienced, and imperious libertine. Even if he comes out unhurt, you can still count him as lost. It's a stamp for life.

"Toward Christmas, she was already tired of him. She went back to one of her former passions. But he couldn't give her up. He would trail her, like a ghost. He grew thin and dark. Using exalted language, 'death already lay upon his lofty brow.' He was terribly jealous of everybody. It was said that he used to stand for whole nights under her window.

"Once, in the spring, their regiment had an outing or a picnic. I knew both her and him personally, although I was not present when it happened. As usual everybody drank a good deal. They were coming back on foot, along the railroad-tracks. Suddenly a freight-train appeared, coming toward them. It was going up a steep slope, very slowly, signalling all the time. And when the headlights were already very near, she whispered in the ensign's ears: 'You always say that you love me. And if I were to order you to throw yourself under the train, I am sure you wouldn't do it.' He never said a word, but rushed right under the train. They say that he had calculated correctly to land between the front and the rear wheels of a car, so as to be cut in half, but some idiot started holding him back. Only he wasn't strong enough to pull the ensign off the rail, which he clutched with his hands. So both of his hands were lopped off."

"How horrible!" exclaimed Vera.

"The ensign had to leave service. His friends got a little money together and helped him go away. He couldn't stay in the city and be a constant living reproach to her and the whole regiment. And the man was lost in the most scoundrelly manner; he

became a beggar and froze to death somewhere near the Petersburg piers. . . .

"The other case was really pitiful. The woman was of the same sort as the other, only young and pretty. And she behaved very, very badly. It disgusted even us, although we were used to regarding these home romances rather lightly. The husband knew everything and saw everything, but never said a word. His friends hinted about it, but he just said: 'Oh, let it alone. It is none of my business. As long as Lenochka is happy. . . .' Such a jackass!

"Finally she tied up with Lieutenant Vishniakov, a subaltern in their company. And so they lived, two husbands and one wife—as though that were the accepted form of wedlock. Then our regiment was sent to war. Our ladies came to see us off, and it was really a shame to look at her. Out of plain decency, she might have looked at her husband at least once. But no, she hung around her lieutenant's neck, like the devil on a dead willow. When we were in the train, she had the insolence to say to her husband: 'Remember that you must take care of Volodya. If anything should happen to him, I'll go away from home and never come back. And I'll take the children with me.'

"And you might think that this captain was some weakling? A rag? A coward? Not at all. As brave a soldier as ever there was. At Green Mountain he led his men six times to attack the Turkish redoubt. Out of his two hundred men only fourteen remained. He himself was wounded twice, and still refused to

go to the hospital. That's the kind of a fellow he was. His men simply adored him.

"But *she* told him. . . . His Lenochka told him!

"And he looked after this coward and drone, Vishniakov, like a nurse, like a mother. At night, when they had to sleep in the mud, he covered him with his own coat. He used to take his place when it came to sapper work, while the lieutenant stayed in bed or played cards. At night he took his place at inspecting the outposts. And at that time, Vera, the *bashi-bazouks* cut down our pickets, as a peasant woman cuts cabbage-heads. I tell you, we all heaved a sigh of relief when we learned that Vishniakov died of typhoid fever. . . ."

"Grandpa, and have you met any women who really loved?"

"Oh, yes, surely, Vera. And I'll say even more. I am sure that every woman is capable of the loftiest heroism in her love. When she kisses a man, embraces him, becomes his wife, she is *already* a mother. If she loves, love for her is the whole purpose of life, the whole universe. It is not her fault that love has assumed such disgusting forms and has become degraded simply to a small amusement, a sort of convenience. It is men's fault, for they become satiated at twenty, and live on, with bodies like those of chickens, and souls like those of hares, incapable of powerful desires, of heroic deeds, of adoration before love. People say that it was different before. And if it wasn't, did not the best human minds and souls dream of it—the poets, the novelists, the artists,

the musicians? A few days ago, I read the story of Manon Lescaut and Cavalier de Grieux. . . . Would you believe me that I wept over it? Now tell me truly, doesn't every woman, in her inmost soul, dream of such a love, which is all-forgiving, modest, self-sacrificing, self-denying?"

"Oh, surely, surely, grandpa. . . ."

"And if they do not have love like that, women take vengeance. Another thirty years will go by. . . . I shall not see it, but you, Vera, may. In some thirty years from now, women will have an unheard-of power. They will be dressed like Hindoo idols. They will trample us men under foot, like contemptible, cringing slaves. Their mad fancies and whims will become painful laws for us. And all this will come about because, in the course of whole generations, we had not learned to adore love. That will be the revenge. You know the law of action and reaction, don't you?"

After a moment's silence, he suddenly asked:

"Tell me, Vera, if it isn't too hard, what kind of a story is that one about the telegraphist, the one that Prince Vasily told to-night? How much of it is truth, and how much is just imagination, as in all his stories?"

"Does it interest you, grandpa?"

"Just as you like, Vera. If you wouldn't like. . . ."

"Why, no, not at all. I should be very glad to tell you."

And she told the commandant how some madman began to annoy her with his love two years before her marriage. She had never seen him and did not

know his name. He only wrote to her, and signed his letters "G. S. Z." In one of the letters he mentioned the fact that he was a petty official in some government institution—he had never said anything about being a telegraphist. He was evidently watching all her movements, as in his letters he mentioned accurately the places that she had visited, as well as the dresses she had worn. At first the letters were rather vulgar and curiously passionate. But once Vera sent him a note (this fact should not be mentioned at home, as no one there knows about it), asking him to stop annoying her with his declarations of love. From that time on he never mentioned his love, and wrote but seldom, on New Year's Day, Easter, and her birthday. Princess Vera told Anosov also about that morning's present and repeated, almost word for word, the strange letter of her mysterious admirer. . . .

"Ye-es," said the general slowly, when she had finished. "Perhaps this fellow is mad, a plain maniac. But then, who knows? Perhaps your life path has been crossed by the kind of love of which all women dream, and of which men are incapable nowadays? Don't you see any lights over there? That must be my carriage."

At the same time, the loud snorting of an automobile was heard from behind, and the rough road shone with white acetylene light. It was Gustav Ivanovich's car.

"I took your things along, Anna. Get in," said he. "Won't you allow me to take you over, your Excellency?"

"No, thanks," said the general. "I don't like that

machine. It only shakes you up and has all sorts of smells, but you can't enjoy it. Well, good night, Vera. I am going to come often now," added he, kissing Vera's hand and forehead.

They parted. Mr. Friesse brought Vera Nikolayevna to the gates of her home, then swung his car around and disappeared in the darkness, together with his snorting and howling automobile.

IX

It was with an unpleasant feeling that Princess Vera came up the steps of the piazza and entered the house. Even at a distance she heard the loud voice of her brother Nikolay, and when she came nearer to the house she saw him walking rapidly from one end of the room to the other. Vasily Lvovich was sitting at the card-table and, his large, light-haired head bent over the table, was drawing figures on the green cloth.

"Haven't I been insisting on it for a long time?" Nikolay was saying angrily, making a gesture with his right hand as though he was trying to throw a heavy object on the floor. "Haven't I been insisting for a long time that this whole history of foolish letters must come to an end? Even before you and Vera were married, when I was assuring you that you were both merely amusing yourselves like children, and saw nothing but fun and amusement in them. . . . Oh, here is Vera herself. . . . Why, we were just talking with Vasily Lvovich, about that crazy

fellow of yours, that P. P. Z. I consider this correspondence both insolent and disgusting."

"There was no correspondence at all," interrupted Prince Sheyin coldly. "He was the only one that wrote."

Vera blushed at this and sat down on the couch in the shadow of the large house plant.

"I apologize for using that expression," said Nikolay Nikolayevich and again threw to the ground some invisible, heavy object which he seemed to have torn away from his chest.

"And I do not understand at all why you insist on calling him mine," added Vera, glad of her husband's support. "He is just as much yours as mine."

"All right, I apologize again. But at any rate what I want to say is that it is time to put an end to all this nonsense. It seems to me that things have gone beyond the limit within which one can laugh and draw funny pictures. And believe me, if there is anything that I am worrying about just now, it is the good name of Vera, and yours, too, Vasily Lvovich."

"Oh, I am afraid that is putting the thing a little bit too strong, Kolya," replied Sheyin.

"That's possible, but both of you run a risk of finding yourselves in a very funny situation."

"I do not see how," said the prince.

"Just imagine that this idiotic bracelet," Nikolay picked up the red case from the table and immediately replaced it with a gesture of aversion, "that this monstrous trinket will remain in your hands, or we

shall throw it away, or give it to the maid. Then, in the first place, P. P. Z. can boast to his friends of the fact that Princess Vera Nikolayevna Sheyin accepts his presents, and in the second place, he might be encouraged to repeat the same feat. To-morrow he might send you a diamond ring, the day after to-morrow, a pearl necklace, and then, all of a sudden, he will find himself on trial for embezzlement or forgery, and Prince Sheyin together with his wife will have to appear as witnesses at the trial. That would be a fine situation, indeed."

"Oh, no, the bracelet must be sent back at once!" exclaimed Vasily Lvovich.

"I think so, too," said Vera, "and the sooner the better. But how are you going to do it? We know neither his name nor his address."

"That's a very small matter," replied Nikolay Nikolayevich contemptuously. "We know his initials, P. P. Z. Is not that right, Vera?"

"G. S. Z."

"That's fine. Moreover, we know that he's some kind of an official. That's quite sufficient. To-morrow I will get a copy of the city directory and will find there an official with these initials. And if for some reason or other, I do not find him that way, I shall simply call in a detective and order him to find the man for me. In case of difficulty, I shall make use of this note which gives us an idea of his handwriting. At any rate, by two o'clock to-morrow afternoon, I shall know exactly the name and address of this young fellow and even the time when he can be

found at home. And once I know this, we can see him to-morrow, return him his treasure, and take proper measures to make sure that he will never again remind us of his existence."

"What do you propose to do?" asked Prince Vasily Lvovich.

"I will go to the governor and ask him. . . ."

"Oh, no, not to the governor. You know the relations that exist between us two. . . . If you do that, then we shall be sure to find ourselves in a funny situation."

"All right, then, I will go to the colonel of the gendarmes. We belong to the same club. I will ask him to get this Romeo down to his office and tell him a few things. You know how he does it? He just brings a finger right close to the man's nose and shakes it there, as though to say: 'I won't stand for anything like that, sir.'"

"No, no, not through the gendarmes," said Vera.

"That's right, Vera," added the prince. "It would be better not to mix in any outsiders. There would be all sorts of rumors and gossip if we do. We know our town well enough; everybody lives here as though in a glass jar. . . . I guess I myself will go to see this young fellow. . . . Though, the Lord knows, he may be sixty. . . . I will return him the bracelet, and have it out with him."

"Then I will go with you," interrupted Nikolay Nikolayevich. "You are not stern enough. Let me do the talking. . . . And now, my friends," he took out his watch and consulted it, "you will have to

excuse me. I shall go up to my room now. I have two cases to look over before to-morrow morning."

"I begin to feel sorry for this unfortunate fellow, somehow or other," said Vera indecisively.

"There is nothing to feel sorry for," said Nikolay sharply turning around, already in the doorway. "If a man of our circle had permitted himself to send this bracelet and the letter, Prince Vasily would have had to challenge him to a duel. And if he would not have done it, I certainly would. And if this had happened a good many years ago, the chances are I would have ordered him taken to my stable and flogged there. Wait for me to-morrow at your office, Vasily—I shall let you know by telephone."

X

The filthy staircase smelled of mice, cats, kerosene, and washings. On the sixth floor, Prince Vasily Lvovich stopped for a moment.

"Wait a few seconds," said he to his brother-in-law. "Let me rest awhile. I am afraid we should not have done this, Kolya."

They went up another two flights. It was so dark in the hall that Nikolay Nikolayevich had to light two matches before he finally found the number of the apartment he was looking for.

When he rang the bell the door was opened by a stout, gray-haired woman, with her body bent forward a little, as though by some disease.

"Is Mr. Zheltkov in?" asked Nikolay Nikolayevich.

The woman looked hastily and in confusion from one to the other, and back again. The respectable appearance of both of them evidently reassured her.

"Yes, he is in. Step in, please," said she, opening the door. "First door to the left."

Bulat-Tuganovsky knocked three times. A rustle was heard inside the room. He knocked again.

"Come in," was heard weakly from the room.

The room was very low but very large, and almost square in shape. Two round windows, that reminded one of steamer windows, lighted it dimly. The whole room looked more like the cabin of a freight-steamer. A narrow bed stood against one of its walls, a very large and broad divan covered with a worn, though still beautiful carpet, rested against another, and a table with a colored Little-Russian cloth stood in the middle.

The face of the occupant of this room was not visible at first, as he was standing with his back to the light, rubbing his hands in confusion. He was tall and thin, with long, soft hair.

"Mr. Zheltkov, if I am not mistaken?" asked Nikolay Nikolayevich haughtily.

"Yes. I am very glad to see you." He made two steps in the direction toward Tuganovsky with his hand outstretched, but at that moment, as though not noting his greeting, Nikolay Nikolayevich turned around to where Sheyin was standing.

"I told you that we did not make any mistake."

Zheltkov's thin, nervous fingers moved rapidly up

and down the front of his brown coat, unbuttoning it and buttoning it again. Finally he said, bowing awkwardly and pointing to the divan:

"Won't you be seated, please?"

Now his face was visible. It was very pale, almost effeminate, with blue eyes and a dimpled chin that indicated stubbornness. He looked about thirty or thirty-five.

"Thank you," said Prince Sheyin, looking at him attentively.

"Merci," replied Nikolay Nikolayevich. Both remained standing. "We came here only for a few minutes. This is Prince Vasily Lvovich Sheyin, president of the local Assembly of Nobles. My name is Mirza-Bulat-Tuganovsky. I am assistant district attorney. The matter about which I shall have the honor of speaking to you concerns equally both the prince and myself, or, rather, the prince's wife, and my sister."

Zheltkov became even more confused, sat down silently on the divan and whispered, "Won't you be seated?" but, evidently recalling that he had already invited them to be seated, he jumped up to his feet, ran over to the window, and then returned to his old place. And again his trembling fingers moved up and down the front of his coat, tugging at the buttons, then moving up to his face and touching his light mustache.

"I am at your service, your Highness," said he in a dull voice, looking at Vasily Lvovich with entreaty in his eyes.

But Sheyin remained silent, while Nikolay Nikolayevich began to talk.

"In the first place, allow us to return you this thing," said he taking the red case out of his pocket and placing it on the table. "No doubt it does honor to your taste, but we would ask you to see that such surprises are not repeated any more."

"I beg your pardon. . . . I realize myself that I was a fool," whispered Zheltkov, blushing and looking down on the floor. "May I offer you some tea?"

"Now you see, Mr. Zheltkov," continued Nikolay Nikolayevich, as though he did not hear Zheltkov's last words, "I am very glad to find you a gentleman, and one who understands things perfectly. It seems to me that we will be able to come to an understanding very soon. Unless I am mistaken, you have been writing letters to Vera Nikolayevna for seven or eight years?"

"Yes," answered Zheltkov quietly, lowering his eyelashes reverently.

"Until the present time we did not undertake anything against you, although, as you will yourself agree, we not only could have, but *should* have done it."

"Yes."

"Yes. But your last action in sending this bracelet of garnets carried you beyond the limit of our patience. Do you understand? Our patience is at an end. I shall be frank with you. Our first thought was to seek the aid of the authorities. But we did not do that, and I am very glad that we didn't, because, I repeat, I realized immediately that you are a man of nobleness of mind."

"I beg your pardon. What did you say just then?" suddenly asked Zheltkov and laughed. "You wanted to seek the aid of the authorities? Isn't that what you said?" He put his hands in his pockets, sat down comfortably on the divan, then took out a cigarette-case and matches, and lighted a cigarette.

"And so you said that you were going to seek the aid of the authorities? You will excuse me for sitting down, won't you?" said he, turning to Sheyin. "Yes, I am listening."

The prince moved the chair over to the table and sat down. He could not take his gaze from the face of this peculiar man and was gazing at him with perplexity and curiosity.

"But you see, my dear fellow, that we can always fall back on this measure," continued Nikolay Nikolayevich, a little insolently. "To break into another man's family. . . ."

"I beg your pardon, but I shall have to interrupt you. . . ."

"I beg *your* pardon, but *I* shall have to interrupt you, now . . ." almost shouted Tuganovsky.

"Just as you like. Proceed. I am listening to you. But I have a few words to say to Prince Vasily Lvovich. . . ."

And without paying any more attention to Tuganovsky, he said:

"This is the most difficult moment of my life. And I must speak to you, prince, outside of all conventionalities. Will you listen to me?"

"I am listening," said Sheyin. "Now, won't you keep quiet for a few minutes, Kolya," said he impa-

tiently, noting Tuganovsky's angry gesture. "I am listening."

For a few seconds it seemed as though Zheltkov was suffocating. Then he suddenly began to talk, though his white lips seemed to be perfectly motionless.

"It is hard to say . . . to say that I love your wife. But seven years of hopeless and perfectly polite love give me a right to say this. I agree with you that I was at fault when I wrote foolish letters to Vera Nikolayevna before she was married, and even expected to receive a reply. I agree also that my last act, in sending this bracelet, was even more foolish. But . . . I am looking you straight in the eyes now, and I feel that you will understand me. I know it is outside of my power to stop loving her. . . . Tell me, prince . . . suppose that this is unpleasant to you . . . tell me, what you would have done in order to make me stop it? Would you have sent me to another city, as Nikolay Nikolayevich has just said? What difference would that make? I would still continue to love Vera Nikolayevna just as before. Would you send me to prison? But even there I will find some way of letting her know of my existence. There is only one thing that remains, and that is death. . . . If you wish it, I shall take death in any form you prescribe."

"Now, look here,—this sounds more like reciting dramatic poetry than doing business," said Nikolay Nikolayevich, putting on his hat. "The matter is quite simple. You will choose one of the two: either you will stop pestering Vera Nikolayevna with your

letters, or else, if you do not stop, we shall have to take measures which our position enables us to take."

But Zheltkov did not even look at him, although he heard his words. He turned to Prince Vasily Lvovich and said:

"Will you allow me to leave you for ten minutes? I will not conceal from you that I am going to speak to Princess Vera Nikolayevna on the telephone. I assure you that I shall repeat to you everything that I will find it possible to repeat."

"Go," said Sheyin.

When Vasily Lvovich and Tuganovsky remained alone, Nikolay Nikolayevich immediately began to scold his brother-in-law.

"Now, this is impossible," he was shouting and making gestures as though he were throwing an object to the ground. "Did I not warn you that I was going to do all of the talking? And there you went, and weakened down, and let him tell all about his feelings. I would have done the thing in two words."

"Wait a few minutes," said Prince Vasily Lvovich. "Things will become clear in a few minutes. The main thing is that when I see his face I feel that this man is unable to deceive and to lie. And just think, Kolya, it is not his fault that he cannot control his love. Nobody can do it. You know perfectly well it is a feeling that has not even now been explained." After a moment's reflection, the prince continued: "I am sorry for this man. And not only sorry for him, but I feel that we stand in the presence of a great tragedy, and I cannot play the part of the clown."

"This is decadence and nothing else," said Nikolay Nikolayevich.

Ten minutes later Zheltkov returned. His eyes were glistening and had an expression of profundity as though filled with unshed tears. It was evident that he had forgotten who was expected to sit and where. And again Sheyin understood.

"I am ready," said Zheltkov. "To-morrow you will see nothing more of me. You may consider me dead. But there is one condition—I am saying this to *you*, Prince Vasily Lvovich—you see, I have spent money that did not belong to me, and I have to leave the city immediately. Will you allow me to write my last letter to Princess Vera Nikolayevna?"

"No. Everything is over now. No more letters," shouted Nikolay Nikolayevich.

"All right, write it," said Sheyin.

"That's all," said Zheltkov, with a haughty smile. "You will never again hear from me, nor, of course, see me. Princess Vera Nikolayevna did not wish to speak with me. But when I asked her whether I may remain in the city, in order to see her from time to time, without, of course, her seeing me, she replied: 'Oh, if you only knew how tired I am of all this! Won't you please put an end to it?' And now I am putting an end to it. I think I have done all that I can."

When he returned home that night Vasily Lvovich repeated to his wife all the details of his interview with Zheltkov. He felt himself obliged to do this.

Although she was troubled, Vera did not seem astonished and did not become confused. Only, that night,

when her husband came over to her, she suddenly turned her face to the wall and said: "Let me alone. I know that this man is going to kill himself."

XI

Princess Vera Nikolayevna never read the newspapers; in the first place because they soiled her hands and, in the second, because she could not make anything out of the way the news is reported nowadays.

But fate made her open the newspaper sheet almost at the spot where she read the following:

"A mysterious death. Last night at about seven o'clock, an official of the Department of Control, G. S. Zheltkov, committed suicide. According to the information obtained by the coroner, the suicide came as a result of the late Zheltkov's embezzlement. This fact was mentioned in a letter left by the suicide. In view of the fact that the testimony of the witnesses made it apparent that the act was committed of his own free will, it was decided not to perform an autopsy."

Reading this, Vera thought to herself:

"Why is it that I felt this was coming, this very, tragic end? And what was it, love or insanity?"

She walked up and down the garden and the orchard paths all day long. Her restlessness would not let her sit down for a moment. All her thoughts were concentrated on this unknown man, whom she had never seen, and whom, perhaps, she would never see.

"Who knows? Perhaps your life path was crossed

by a real, self-sacrificing, true love," she recalled Anosov's words.

At six o'clock the mail came. Vera readily recognized Zheltkov's handwriting, and with a tenderness, which she did not herself expect, she opened the letter. It ran as follows:

"It is not my fault, Vera Nikolayevna, that God has willed to send me such great happiness as my love for you. It so happened that nothing in life interests me, neither politics, nor science, nor care for the future happiness of mankind—my whole life was concentrated in my feeling toward you. And now I feel that I cut into your life like an unwelcome wedge. If you can, forgive me for this. I am leaving to-day never to return, and there will be nothing that will remind you of me.

"I am only infinitely thankful to you because you are in existence. I have subjected myself to all sorts of tests; this is not a disease, a maniacal delusion, but love which God has granted me to reward me for something or other.

"Even if I should appear ludicrous in your eyes and in those of your brother, Nikolay Nikolayevich—going away forever I still repeat in adoration: '*May your name be holy forevermore.*'

"I saw you for the first time eight years ago in the box of a theatre, and I said to myself in the very first second: 'I love her because there is nothing in the world that is like her, there is nothing better, there is not an animal, not a plant, not a star, not a human

being more beautiful and more delicate than she is.' The whole beauty of the earth seemed to me to have become embodied in you.

"Just think of what I should have done under the circumstances. To run away to another city? My heart would have still been near you and every moment of my life would have been filled with you, with thoughts of you, with dreams about you—with a sweet delirium. I am very much ashamed because of that foolish bracelet, but that was just a mistake of mine. I can imagine what an impression the whole thing made on your guests!

"In ten minutes I shall be gone. I shall only have time to put a stamp on this letter and drop it in the mail-box, for I would not have any one else do it. Will you please burn this letter? I have just lit a fire in my stove and am burning up everything that was dearest to me in life: your handkerchief which I stole—you left it on your chair at a ball; your note—oh, how I kissed it!—in which you forbade me to write to you; the programme of an art exhibition which you once held in your hands and left on your chair on going out. . . . Everything is finished. I have put an end to everything, but I still think, and I am even sure of it, that you will remember me sometimes. And if you should happen to remember, then. . . . I know that you are musical, for oftenest of all I saw you at the Beethoven concerts—if you should remember, will you please play or have somebody else play for you the Sonata in D-dur, No. 2, Op. 2.

"I do not know how to finish this letter. From the

bottom of my heart I thank you because you were the only joy of my life, my only solace, my only thought. May God grant you happiness, may nothing transient and vain trouble your beautiful soul. I kiss your hand. G. S. Z."

She came to her husband with her eyes red from tears and, showing him the letter, said:

"I do not want to conceal anything from you, but I feel that something terrible has forced itself into our life. You and Nikolay must have done something that should not have been done."

Prince Sheyin read the letter attentively, folded it carefully, and said, after a long silence:

"I have no doubt that this man was sincere, and what is more, I do not dare to analyze his feelings toward you."

"Is he dead?" asked Vera.

"Yes, he is dead. I will only say that he did love you and was not mad. I did not take my eyes away from him, and I saw every movement of his face. Life was impossible for him without you. And it seemed to me that I was in the presence of a suffering so colossal, that men die when once stricken by it, and I almost realized that there was a dead man before me. I hardly knew what to do in his presence, how to conduct myself. . . ."

"Would it pain you, Vasya," interrupted Vera Nikolayevna, "if I should go to the city and see his corpse?"

"No, no, Vera, on the contrary. I would have gone

myself, but Nikolay spoiled everything for me. I am afraid I would feel constrained."

XII

Vera Nikolayevna stepped from her carriage when it came within two blocks of Luther Street. She did not encounter any difficulty in finding the house where Zheltkov lived. She was met by the same gray-eyed old woman, who, again, as on the preceding day, asked:

"Whom did you wish to see?"

"Mr. Zheltkov," said the princess. Her costume, her hat, her gloves, and her somewhat commanding tone must have produced an effect on the lady. She became talkative.

"Step in, step in, please, the first door to the left. . . . He left us in such an awful hurry. Suppose it was an embezzlement—why not tell me about it? Of course you know how rich we are when we have to rent out rooms. But I could have gotten six or seven hundred roubles together and paid for him. If you only knew what a fine man he was, madam! He lived here for over eight years, and always seemed more like a son than a roomer."

There was a chair in the hall and Vera sat down upon it.

"I was a friend of your late roomer," said she, choosing each word carefully. "Tell me something about the last minutes of his life, of what he did and said."

"Two gentlemen came to see him and spoke to him for a long time. Then he told me that they had offered him the position of a superintendent on their estate. Then he ran over to the telephone and came back looking very happy. Then the two gentlemen went away, and he sat down to write a letter. Then he went out and mailed the letter, and when he came back we heard a shot as though somebody was shooting out of a toy pistol. We paid no attention to it. At seven o'clock he always had his tea. Lukerya, our servant, went and knocked at the door, but nobody answered, and so she knocked again and again. Then we had to break down the door, and we found him already dead."

"Tell me something about the bracelet," ordered Vera Nikolayevna.

"Oh, yes, about the bracelet, I had forgotten. How do you know about it? Just before he wrote the letter, he came to me and said, 'Are you a Catholic?' and I said, 'Yes, I am a Catholic.' Then he said, 'You have a beautiful custom,' that's just what he said, 'a beautiful custom to hang rings, necklaces, and other gifts before the image of the Holy Virgin. Will you please take this bracelet and hang it before the image?' I promised him that I would do it."

"Will you show me his body?" asked Vera.

"Certainly, certainly, lady. They wanted to take him to the anatomical theatre. But he has a brother who begged them to let him be buried like a Christian. Step in, please."

Vera opened the door. There were three wax

candles burning in the room, which was filled with the odor of some incense. Zheltkov's body was lying on the table. His head was bent far back, as though somebody had put but a very small pillow under it. There was a profound dignity in his closed eyes, and his lips were smiling with such happiness and calm as though just before leaving life he had learned a deep and sweet secret which solved the whole problem of his life. She recalled that she had seen the same pacified expression on the masks of the great sufferers, Pushkin and Napoleon.

"If you wish it, lady, I can go out of the room," said the old woman, and there was something extremely intimate in her tone.

"Yes, I will call you later," said Vera, and immediately took out of the side pocket of her coat a large, red rose. Then, with her left hand, she raised Zheltkov's head a little and placed the flower under it. At that moment she realized that the love of the kind that is the dream of every woman had gone by her. She recalled the words of General Anosov about love that is exceptional and eternal—words that proved to be almost prophetic. She pushed away the hair on the forehead of the dead man, pressed his temples with her hand, and kissed the cold, moist forehead with a long, friendly kiss.

When she was leaving, the proprietress said to her in that characteristically soft, Polish tone: "Lady, I see that you are not like all the others who come out of curiosity. Mr. Zheltkov told me before his death that if he should happen to die and a lady came to see

his corpse, I should tell her that Beethoven's best work is . . . he wrote it down on a piece of paper. Here it is. . . ."

"Let me see it," said Vera Nikolayevna, and suddenly burst into tears.

"Excuse me, but his death affected me so much that I cannot help this."

Then she read the following words, written in the well-known handwriting:

L. Van Beethoven, Sonata No. 2, Op. 2, Largo Appassionato.

XIII

It was late in the evening when Vera Nikolayevna returned home, and she was very glad to find that neither her husband nor her brother had arrived.

But she was met by Jennie Reiter, the pianist, and, still under the impression of what she had seen and heard, Vera ran to her and exclaimed, kissing her beautiful hands:

"Jennie, dear, won't you play something for me now?" And she immediately left the room, went out into the garden and sat on a bench.

She did not doubt for a moment that Jennie would play the very part of the second sonata about which that dead man with such a funny name had told her in his last note.

So it was. She recognized the very first chords as belonging to that remarkable creation of musical genius, unique for its profoundness. And her soul

seemed to have split in twain. She was thinking of the great love, which is repeated but once in a thousand years, and which had gone past her. She recalled the words of General Anosov, and asked herself why it was that this man had compelled her to listen to this particular work of Beethoven, even against her wishes? In her mind she began to improvise words. Her thoughts seemed to have so blended with the music, that they really fell into cantos, each of which ended with the words: *May your name be holy forevermore.*

"Now I will show you in gentle sounds, a love that joyfully and obediently gave itself to pains, sufferings, and death. Not a complaint, not a reproach, not a pain of self-love, did I ever know. Before you, I am this one prayer: *May your name be holy forevermore.*

"I foresee suffering, blood, and death. I think that it is hard for the body to part with the soul, but my praise for you, my passionate praise, and my silent love are eternal: *May your name be holy forevermore.*

"I recall your every step, smile, look, the sound of your footsteps. My last recollections are intertwined with a sweet sadness, a beautiful, quiet sadness. But I will cause you no grief. I am parting alone and in silence, for God and Fate have willed this. *May your name be holy forevermore.*

"In the sad hour of death, I pray but to you. Life might have been beautiful for me, too. Do not complain, my poor heart, do not complain. In my soul I call for death, but my heart is full of prayers for you: *May your name be holy forevermore.*

"Neither you yourself nor those around you know how beautiful you are. The hour strikes. The time has come. And on the brink of death, in this sorrowful hour of parting from life, I still sing, *Glory be to you.*

"Here it comes, the all-pacifying death, and I still say, *Glory be to you!*"

Princess Vera stood under an acacia tree, leaning against it, weeping softly. And the tree was swaying gently under the light wind, which made the leaves rustle, as though to sympathize with her. The star-shaped flowers in the garden exhaled their fragrance. And the wonderful music, as if obeying her grief, rang on:

"Be calm, my dear, be calm. Do you remember me? Do you remember? You were my only and my last love. Be calm, for I am with you. Think about me, and I shall be with you, because we loved each other but for a short instant, yet forever. Do you remember me? Do you remember? Do you remember? Now I feel your tears. Be calm. My sleep is so sweet, sweet, sweet."

When she had finished playing, Jennie Reiter came out into the garden and saw Princess Vera sitting on the bench in tears.

"What is it?" asked the pianist.

And with her eyes still glistening with tears, Vera began to kiss her face, her lips, her eyes, saying:

"No, no, he has forgiven me now. Everything is well."

THE HORSE-THIEVES

I

ONE evening, in the middle of July, two men were lying in the rushes on the shore of the small Polyesse river Zulnia. One of them was a beggar from the village of Kazimirovka, named Onisim Kozel, while the other one was his grandson, Vasil, a boy of thirteen. The old man was half asleep, his face covered by his torn, sheep-fur cap for protection against the flies, while Vasil lay with his chin resting on the palms of his hands and his screwed-up eyes gazing vacantly at the river, at the warm, cloudless, sky, and at the far-away pine-trees that stood black against the fiery light of the sunset.

The wide river, as still as a swamp, was hidden almost entirely by the firm leaves of pond-lilies, with their beautiful, gentle, white flowers standing out languidly. Only on the other side, near the opposite shore, there was a clear, smooth band of water uncovered by the leaves, and the boy saw reflected in it, with remarkable distinctness, the rushes, the black, broken line of the forest, and the light behind it. On this shore of the river, very close to the water, stood old, hollow, white willows, placed at almost equal distances from one another. Their short, straight branches were rising upward, and the trees themselves,

short, large, and crooked, looked like so many old men raising their thin arms toward the sky.

The river birds were whistling sadly. At times a large fish would splash in the water. The thrips flew above the water in a transparent, thin, trembling column. Suddenly Kozel raised his head from the ground and looked at Vasil with a vacant, meaningless glance.

"What did you say?" asked he in a scarcely audible voice.

The boy did not answer. He did not even turn around to look at the old man, only slowly, and with a stubborn, tired expression, lowered and raised again his long eyelashes.

"I guess they will come soon," continued the old man, as though addressing himself. "Guess I'll take a smoke."

Drowsily rolling from side to side, he finally landed in a squatting position. The fingers of both his hands were cut off, with the exception of the thumb of the left hand. And with the use of this finger, he quickly filled his pipe, holding it against his knee with the stump of his right hand, took a box of matches from his cap, and lit the pipe. A sweetish smoke of cheap tobacco, with a faint odor of mignonettes, floated in the air in bluish curls.

"Did you see Buzyga yourself?" asked Vasil, apparently with reluctance, without taking his eyes away from the opposite bank of the river.

Kozel took the pipe out of his mouth, and, bending over to one side, spat on the ground.

"Sure, I did. My, but he is a desperate man. Just

the way I was, when I was younger. He gets drunk as the night and then goes out into the village . . . and hires a band of Jewish musicians to walk in front of him and play. Carries a handkerchief in his right hand and has new rubbers on his boots, and wears a nice silver chain. And then he comes to Gripa Kovaleva and demands some whiskey. He throws a silver rouble into the glass, drinks the whiskey, and then gives the money to his musicians. The boys all run after him. Of course, everybody looks at him as though they were dogs and he was a wolf, but they can't do anything. Just snap their teeth."

"Oh!" exclaimed the boy with adoration, though almost incredulously.

"Why, sure. . . . What does he care? He just spits on them all. Just tells them to let him alone, because he never stole their horses. Of course, if he had stolen their horses and they had caught him, then they would have the upper hand, then they'd have the right to beat him. . . . But that way, it won't go. . . ."

The boy gazed at the river in silence. The resounding cries of the frogs were now heard from the near-by bank, at first coming slowly and infrequently. The evening fog was like smoke in the rushes and hung over the water like light steam. The sky grew darker and greenish, and on it was now distinctly visible the hitherto concealed disk of the young moon.

"Kozel, and is it true that Buzyga has double ribs?" asked Vasil meditatively. "Is it true that you can't kill him?"

"Of course, it's true. What do you expect? All his ribs are grown together. You can beat a man like Buzyga as much as you want, but you will never hurt his liver. Oh, no! Because his liver is attached to his ribs. And the liver is the first thing in a man's body. A man can't live, once you hurt his liver. He'll get weak, start spitting blood, won't be able to eat or drink, and then it's all over. . . ."

The boy touched his narrow chest, his sides, and heaved a long sigh.

"And then they say that people have double backs like horses," said he sadly. "Is it true, too, Kozel?"

"Yes, that's true. Happens sometimes."

"And Buzyga, too?"

"What about Buzyga?"

"Is it true that he's got a double back?"

"Well, I don't know about that, can't say."

"I think that it must be double."

"Everything is possible," and the old man shook his head. "Everything is possible. . . . But the main thing is that Buzyga's got a clever head. He's a wonderful man! Once he got caught in Shepelevka. . . . Well, even that time he was not really caught; he was betrayed by another man. It was about some woman or something like that. At any rate, they got him in the open field, and the horses were with him. It was toward evening. So, of course, they brought him to a house, lit the light, and started beating him. And they were at it the whole night long. When the peasants start beating somebody, they have a rule

that everybody must take part in it. They even bring their children and wives and make them beat the man, so that everybody would be responsible. So they beat him and beat him, and when they'd get tired, they'd drink a little whiskey, and then start at it again. And Mitro Gundosy saw that Buzyga was already half-dead, and so he says: 'Wait awhile, boys, the rascal might die here in our house. Wait awhile, I'll give him a little water.' But Buzyga is so clever, he knows that if a man is given a little water after being beaten like that, that's a sure end. So he gets all his strength together and says to them: 'Won't you please give me just a little whiskey, and then start beating me again if you like? I feel that my end is coming and I wish I could taste whiskey again before I die.' Well they all laughed at that and gave him a bottle. After that they did not touch him any more. They thought he was near death anyway. They took him over to Basov Kut and threw him in there, as though he were already dead. They thought that was the end of him, but Levonty got over it. Two months after that Mitro Gundosy missed two fine horses. First-class horses they were. . . ."

"That must have been Buzyga, all right," exclaimed the boy joyfully.

"Whoever it was, it's none of our business," retorted Kozel angrily and significantly. "After that Gundosy went to Buzyga several times and got down on his knees before him and kissed his feet. 'Take all the money you want, only tell me where the horses are. You know!' And he would answer him: 'Why don't

you go and get a drink of water, Mitro?' That's the kind of a fellow Buzyga is!"

The old beggar became silent and puffed fiercely at his pipe. But the pipe gave no more smoke. Then Kozel sighed, emptied the pipe over his bare foot, and thrust it into his shirt.

The frogs were now croaking on all sides. It seemed that the whole air trembled with their passionate, ringing cries, accompanied by the dull, prolonged, slow groans of large toads. The sky had changed from green into dark blue and the moon was shining like the curved blade of a silver halberd. It was already dark all around. Only near the very bank of the other side of the river were burning two long, bloody bands.

"Kozel, when I grow up, I'll be a horse-thief too!" said the boy suddenly, in a low, passionate whisper. "I don't want to be a beggar, I'll be like Buzyga."

"Sh. . . . Wait a minute . . ." said the old man suddenly. He raised upward his terrible thumb, bent his head to one side and listened attentively. "They are coming!"

Vasil jumped to his feet. From the thick rushes that stood near the very water-line came scarcely audible splashes of somebody's footsteps. Dull, monotonous voices were heard.

"Shout to them, Vasil," ordered the old man. "Only not very loud."

"*Hop-hop!*" shouted the boy, but his voice was not very strong because of excitement.

"*Hop!*" came a restrained, calm bass from a distance.

II

The curly tops of the rushes trembled as they were carefully pushed aside by some one's hand. A short, stocky, apparently awkward peasant in a torn brown coat appeared from the rushes, and, with body bent forward, stepped upon the trampled down, dry spot where the beggar and the boy were sitting. His straight, hard hair fell down his face, almost covering his black, slanting eyes, which had a gloomy and suspicious look. He held his head bent downward and a little to one side, somewhat like a bear, and when he had to look to one side, he slowly and awkwardly turned with his whole body, as is usually done by men with short necks or diseased throats. This was Akim Shpak, the well-known dealer in stolen goods. He often informed the horse-thieves of likely opportunities and sometimes even helped them.

Shpak looked at the old man and the boy closely, and with an expression of enmity, then turned back with his whole ridiculous body and his immovable neck, and said hoarsely:

"Over here, Buzyga!"

"Here!" came back in a merry, low, self-confident voice, the word being pronounced in a military fashion.

"Good evening to you, gentlemen rascals."

A tall, red-haired man, dressed in city clothes, with high, elegant boots, stepped into the clearing. He extended his hand to Kozel but drew it back immediately, noting his blunder.

"Oh, the devil . . . I've forgotten that you have nothing to shake hands with," said he carelessly. "Well, good evening anyway. Is this the lad you were talking about?" and he pointed to Vasil.

"Yes, yes," the old beggar nodded his head hastily. "He is quick, just like a bullet. Well, sit down, Levonty."

"I will sit down all right, and be a guest, and if I treat you to some whiskey, I will be the host," jested Buzyga indifferently, sitting down on the ground. "Let's see what you've got there, Akim."

Akim took from the bag a bottle of whiskey, a few hard-boiled eggs, and half a loaf of bread, and placed them all on the grass in front of Buzyga. Kozel followed every one of his movements greedily, and nervously tugged with his only finger at his grayish mustache.

"And I thought you would never come," said the old beggar, turning his face toward Buzyga, but without taking his eyes from Akim's hands. "I saw you in Berezna a few hours ago and you were more drunk than whiskey itself. And I thought that you would not come this evening. But you don't show it now."

"Whiskey doesn't affect me," said Buzyga slowly. "I was bluffing more than anything else. And besides, I slept until evening."

"At Gripa's?"

"Any of your business? And suppose it was there?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. Only, women like you."

"Oh, the devil take them. Let them like me." Buzyga shrugged his shoulders indifferently. "Are you jealous?"

"Who, I? My time is past. I have forgotten how to think about it. . . . I guess she did not want to let you go?"

"Oh, yes, as if she could hold me back!" Buzyga threw up his chin with a self-confident expression on his face. "You had better take a drink of this whiskey, old fellow. I see that you are trying to get somewhere. Why don't you ask straight out?"

"Oh, I have nothing to ask, nothing at all. I was just wondering. . . . Well, to your health, Buzyga; may God send you health and success in all your enterprises."

The old man clasped the neck of the bottle with his thumb as though it were a movable hook, and raised the bottle to his mouth with a shaking hand. For a long time he strained the whiskey through his teeth, then returned the bottle to Buzyga, dried his mouth with the sleeve of his coat, and asked:

"Did she ask you where you were going?"

"Who?"

"Gripa."

Buzyga looked at the old man seriously and attentively.

"Suppose she did ask. What of that?" he said slowly, knitting his eyebrows.

"Why, I. . . . Nothing at all. . . . I know, anyway, that you would not tell. . . ."

"You had better shut your mouth, Uncle Kozel," the taciturn Akim advised him weightily, looking off at a distance to one side.

"You are trying to be too smart, you old dog," said Buzyga, and in his strong voice were suddenly heard

tones that reminded one of wild animals. "Look out. It is not for you to teach Buzyga. When Buzyga says that he is going to be in Kresher, that means that they are going to look for him in Filippovichi, and in the meantime Buzyga will be selling his horses at the Stepan fair. Shpak is right. You had better keep still."

While Buzyga was speaking, Vasil did not take his eyes from him. There was nothing extraordinary in the horse-thief's appearance. His large face, marked by smallpox, with red mustaches curled in a military fashion, was motionless and seemed weary. His little, blue eyes, surrounded by white lashes, appeared drowsy, and it was only for a moment that a peculiarly keen and cruel expression shone in them. All his motions were slow, lazy, as though his purpose was to expend the least possible effort, but his powerful neck, visible from under his shirt, his long arms with their large hands covered with red hair, and his broad back spoke of gigantic strength.

Under the boy's persistent gaze, Buzyga involuntarily turned his head toward him. The light in his eyes immediately became extinguished, and his face became indifferent once more.

"Why are you looking at me, boy?" he asked calmly. "What is your name?"

"Vasil," answered the boy, and coughed. His own voice seemed to him to be so weak and whistling.

Kozel tittered servilely.

"He-he-he! Ask him, Buzyga, what he is going to

do when he grows up. We were talking about it just before you came. 'I don't want to be a beggar like you,' says he, 'I am going to be like Buzyga. . . .' I thought I'd die laughing!" lied Kozel, for some reason or other.

The boy quickly turned to his grandfather. His large gray eyes were dark and glaring with anger.

"All right, all right, you shut up," said he rudely, in a broken, childish bass.

"You're a good lad!" exclaimed Buzyga, with astonishment and sudden tenderness in his voice. "Come over here. Do you drink whiskey?"

He put Vasil between his knees and placed his strong, large arms around his thin body.

"Yes," answered the boy bravely.

"My, but you are going to be a fine thief, by and by. Here, swallow some of this."

"Maybe it will hurt him?" said Kozel with hypocritical solicitude, gazing at the bottle greedily.

"Shut up, you old fox. There will be enough for you, too," said Buzyga.

Vasil swallowed some whiskey and began to cough. Something that had the most unpleasant taste and was as hot as fire burned his throat and took away his breath for a moment. He groaned for a few minutes, catching the air with his open mouth like a fish taken out of the water. Tears began to stream from his eyes.

"That's right. Now sit down, and be a Cossack among other Cossacks," said Buzyga and pushed Vasil lightly away from him. And, as though he had

immediately forgotten all about the boy, he turned again to Kozel.

"I have been wanting for some time to ask you where you lost your fingers." Buzyga spoke this slowly, in a low, lazy voice.

"Oh, it happened once," said the old beggar with affected reluctance. "It was about horses."

"Yes, I know it was. . . . Well?"

"Well. . . . It isn't very interesting," replied Kozel slowly. He was anxious to tell in detail of the terrible accident that cut his life into two halves. And he was purposely tuning up the attention of his hearers. "It was some thirty years ago. Maybe the man who did this to me is not alive any more. He was a German colonist."

Vasil was lying on his back. He felt a pleasant warmth all over his body which appeared very light, while before his eyes countless tiny spots of light were moving to and fro. Around him were heard human voices; human hands and heads were moving over him. The low, black branches of bushes swayed above him while over his head was the dark sky. But he saw and heard all this without understanding it, as though not he, but some one else were lying there on the ground among the rushes. Then, suddenly, he heard with remarkable distinctness the voice of the old beggar and consciousness returned to him with renewed force and aroused in him an unexpectedly profound attention toward everything around him. And the story which he had heard from Kozel at least thirty times again filled his soul with curiosity, excitement, and horror.

III

". . . Over at the road-house I saw a pair of horses tied to a post," Kozel was saying in a doleful singsong. "The moment I looked at the wagon I knew that they were German horses. The colonists always use wagons like that. And they were a fine pair of horses! My heart almost stopped beating when I saw them. . . . And I know something about horses. There they were standing as if their feet were grown into the ground, and their little ears all standing up, and they were looking at me like two beasts. . . . You can't say that they were very large, would not call them very good just by looking at them either, but I knew immediately what kind of horses they were. You could drive a pair like that for a hundred versts and nothing would happen to them. Just brush their mouths with hay, give them a little water, and go on with your journey. Well, what's the use of talking! I'll say one thing. If God himself, or some saint, would come to me now and say: 'Look here, Onisim, I will give you back your fingers, if you will promise never to steal horses again, . . .' I'll tell you, Buzyga, if I saw those horses, I would take them. May God punish me if I wouldn't. . . ."

"So, what happened?" interrupted Buzyga.

"We're coming to that. Akim, roll me a cigarette, will you? Yes. . . . So I walked and walked around that wagon, maybe for a whole half-hour. I tell you,

the main thing is that a man never knows his own time. If I had untied them right then and there, everything would have been all right. The road was through the woods and it was a dark night; everything was muddy and a good strong wind was blowing. What else could you wish? But I got scared. I just walked around the horses like a fool, thinking to myself: 'Now I've lost my chance. Guess the German will come out of the road-house and that will be the end of it.' Then I would come over again and walk around and think again: 'Lost my chance again! Can't do it now at all.' And I don't know what it was that made me so scared then. . . ."

"You have got to do it quickly," said Buzyga resolutely.

"Why weren't you with me then, Levonty?" exclaimed Kozel in a tone of passionate reproach. "But then! . . . I guess you hadn't been born yet. . . . Yes. So I walked and walked around those horses and that wagon and could not make up my mind to do anything. Maybe it was because I was sober and hungry at the time. Who knows? At first I just waited and moped there, and then suddenly, as though somebody had hit me on the back of the neck, I ran over to the horses, untied the reins, and began to tie up the bells. . . . And just then out comes the German, all ready for the road. As soon as he saw me, he shouted from the steps: 'Hey, you there! What are you doing with my horses? Trying to steal them?' And I answered him: 'Why should I steal this junk of yours? Haven't I got enough of

my own? You had better thank me for tying your horses to the post, otherwise they would have run away on you.' 'All right! All right! I know how you tie horses to posts. Get out of here, you pig!' Well, of course, I walked over to one side and hid back of the house and started watching him. And I was so angry, I trembled all over. 'Oh, no,' thinks I to myself, 'I won't let this go.'"

"Of course not. How could you let it go?" nodded Buzyga. "I would have stolen those horses on him even if it would have taken me a year."

"No, Buzyga, you wouldn't!" replied Kozel with deep conviction. "Not from that German. You wait, don't get angry. . . . Just listen to what happened after that. So I hid back of the house and watched. The German looked around and then shouted to the tavern-keeper: 'Hey, Leyba, bring me some oats.' Leyba brought him some and then asked him: 'But why don't you stay here overnight? We would take good care of your horses.' And he said to him: 'No, thank you, I have no time and I have far to go. I'll feed my horses in the woods by the Volchy Razlog. Good-by.' 'Good-by.' So the colonist got into his wagon and started out.

"Well, I ran after him. Down as far as Myslovo he kept pretty fast, but I knew the road well, and so I ran across the government woods. As soon as I got out on the road again and hid in a ditch, along came the German, driving slowly. I let him get ahead of me and then started to follow him. As soon as he'd start driving fast, I'd break into a run. And when he

would ride slowly, I'd follow him walking. I was only twenty-five then and a pretty strong fellow. No worse than you, Buzyga. And I followed him for thirty versts, down as far as Volchy Razlog. To tell you the truth, I did not hope that he would stop in the woods overnight as he had said. I thought he was saying that just to get me off the track. But he really turned into the woods and stopped at a little clearing. There he unharnessed his horses and fixed up his wagon with the shafts raised up. I crawled along on my belly like a snake, lay down back of some bushes, and watched him. You know, at night, when you look down the hill you can't see anything, but up the hill everything is plain. . . ."

"Yes, I know," said Buzyga impatiently. "Well?"

"Then I saw that he tied the horses' legs. And what he used was iron chains, because I heard them jingle even at a distance. Well, that looked as though he were really going to stay there all night. It was terribly cold and windy. I was shaking all over. But I did not give in. I saw that German get into the wagon, move around a bit, and then lie still. I waited for a long time after that; maybe for an hour or two. I started to get up from the ground a little and thought to myself, 'Is the Dutchman really asleep or is he just pretending?' I picked up a handful of earth and threw it ahead. The Dutchman did not make a noise. And I was angry with him, simply boiling with rage. Every time I recalled how he cursed me over there by the road-house, I would get angrier than ever. Well, I got up from the ground, started looking around, and

there were the two horses coming along right toward me. They'd stop a moment, pick up a little grass or a dry leaf, and then move toward me again. I tell you, Buzyga, there is not a horse that is afraid of me at night. Because there is a certain word. . . ."

"Yes, I know. It's all nonsense," replied the horse-thief angrily. "Well, go ahead."

"All right, just as you like. Pretty soon the horses got so close to me that I could almost touch them. So I moved forward a little and sort of fondled one of them and he stood still. Then I began to cut the irons. I always have a file with me. . . . I worked and worked and kept an eye on the wagon all the time. I decided not to take the other horse because it was very hard to cut the iron. It was thick and new. And I was sure that he would not catch me with one horse, anyway.

"I cut one of the irons to the middle and began to try if I could not break it. And then suddenly somebody touched me on the shoulder. I turned around, and there was the German right behind me. The devil only knows how he ever got there. He stood there looking at me as though he were laughing at me. Then he said: 'Come along with me. I'll teach you how to steal horses.' I was so frightened I could not use my feet, and my tongue seemed to be glued to the roof of my mouth. But he lifted me up from the ground."

"What then?" exclaimed Buzyga wrathfully.

The old man made a sad gesture with his mutilated hand.

"I don't know," he said quietly. "May God strike me dead on this very spot if I know even now how he did it. He was just a little fellow; not much to look at; only up to my shoulders, head and all. And he dragged me along like a little child. And I let him do it—had a sort of feeling that I could not get away from him. I could not even stir. And he got me as though with a pair of pincers and dragged me toward the wagon. How do I know? Maybe he wasn't human at all?

"So we got to the wagon. He held me with one hand and started feeling for something with the other. And I think to myself: 'What is he going to do now?' He looked for something and then said: 'Oh, I guess it isn't here.' Then he led me over to the other side of the wagon, felt there for a while, and finally got a hatchet. 'Here it is,' says he. 'I've found it. Well now, put your hand on the log.' And he said it quietly, without any anger at all. Then I understood that he was going to cut my hands off. And I began to cry like a child. . . . And he says to me: 'Don't cry. It won't take long. . . .' So I stood there like an ox that was being slaughtered, could not say anything, only shook all over. And he took my hand, put it on a piece of wood and brought the hatchet down. 'Don't steal horses, if you don't know how.' Three fingers flew right off. One of them hit me in the face. Then he hit again and again, saying all the time: 'Don't steal horses, if you don't know how. . . .' Then he told me to give him the other hand; I obeyed him like a little child, and

put my left hand there. And he says again, 'Don't steal horses,' and down came the hatchet again. This time he cut off four fingers at one blow; left only this one," and Kozel stretched before him his mutilated hand with its single finger. "He looked at the thumb, looked at it, and then said: 'Well, I guess you won't be able to steal any horses with this one finger. Only you might help another thief with it. Still, I will give it to you so that you can eat and drink with it, light your pipe, and remember me all your life.' The blood was just spurting out of the nine fingers. I could not stand it any more and almost fainted away. Then he grabbed me again like a kitten and carried me over to a big pool of water. The night was dreadfully cold and the water had frozen over. The German brought me there, broke the ice with his foot and told me to stick my hands into the water. I obeyed him and felt much easier right away. And he said to me: 'You'd better stay there until morning. It'll be worse for you if you take your hands out.' And with that he walked away toward his horses and went off. Then I thought to myself that I ought to go to the doctor. But the moment I took my hands out of the water, I started hollering so that I could be heard all over the woods. The fingers hurt as though somebody were burning them with hot irons. Then I stuck them into the water again and felt better. And I stayed there until morning. As soon as I would take my hands out, it would hurt terribly, but as long as I kept them in the water it did not hurt at all. Toward morning I was almost frozen, and the water

became red as blood. Somebody came along, took me into his carriage and brought me to the hospital. Well, they kept me there a month until my hands healed up a little and then let me out. But what was the use?" exclaimed he bitterly. "It would have been a hundred times better if I had died there in the Volchy Razlog!"

He became silent and sat there bent over, with his head bowed low. For a few minutes the horse-thieves sat motionless without saying a word. Suddenly a quiver went through Buzyga's body as though he had just awakened from terrible dreams. He sighed loudly.

"And what did you do with the German after that?" asked he in a restrained voice, which quivered with fury.

"And what could I have done with him?" asked Kozel sadly. "What would you have done if you were in my place?"

"I? I? Oh!" roared Buzyga, fiercely scratching the ground with his finger-nails. He was almost suffocated with anger and his eyes shone in the darkness like those of a wild beast. "I would have cut his throat when he was asleep; I would have torn his throat with my own teeth! I would. . . ."

"You would!" interrupted Kozel with a bitter sneer. "And how would you have found him? Who was he? Where did he live? What was his name? Maybe he was not human at all. . . ."

"That's a lie," said Akim Shpak slowly. He had been silent until now. "There is neither God nor devil in the world. . . ."

"It doesn't make any difference!" shouted Buzyga, striking the ground with his fists. "It doesn't make any difference. I would have burned all the colonies that I could have laid my hands on; killed their cattle and maimed their children. And I would do that until death."

Kozel laughed quietly and bent his head still lower.

"Oh, yes!" said he with a biting reproach. "It's all right to set fire to buildings when you have your ten fingers. . . . But when you have just one left"—the man raised up again his terrible stumps—"there is only one road left open for you, over to the church steps with the beggars. . . ." And he suddenly began to sing in his old, shaky voice the gloomy words of the ancient beggar-song:

> "Woe, woe is me, the cripple. . . .
> Have pity on me, for the sake of Christ. . . .
> You are our benefactors. . . .
> Here we sit, armless, legless,
> We, poor cripples, here by the road. . . ."

The song ended in a cry of writhing pain, his head dropped on his knees, and the old beggar began to sob.

Not a word was said after that. In the river, in the grass and bushes, the frogs were croaking incessantly as if trying to outdo one another. The half-moon stood in the middle of the sky, lonely and sad. The old willows, outlined ominously against the darkened sky, raised their knotty, dried-up arms toward heaven with an expression of silent grief.

IV

Suddenly, heavy, rapid footsteps were heard in the rushes in the direction from which Buzyga and Akim had come a short while before. Somebody was evidently running in haste without picking his way, splashing the water and breaking dry branches. The horse-thieves pricked up their ears. Akim Shpak stood on his knees. Buzyga, his hands on the ground, crouched down, ready to jump up and rush off in an instant.

"Who is that?" asked Vasil in a whisper.

No one answered him. The heavy steps were nearer and nearer. Some one's powerful, hoarse, and whistling breathing could already be heard amidst the splashing of the water and the crackling of the branches. Buzyga quickly shoved his hand into his boot, and before Vasil's eyes glittered a shining knife.

But the noise suddenly stopped. For a moment a remarkably deep silence reigned around. Even the disturbed frogs were silent. Something gigantic and heavy tramped about in the bushes, snorting fiercely, and began to sniff.

"Oh, that must be a boar," said Buzyga, and the other three shivered at the sound of his loud voice. "Must have come to get a drink."

"Yes, that's true," said Shpak, again lying down.

The boar snorted again angrily and then began to run away. For a long time the branches cracked in the direction in which he took flight. Then everything became quiet. The frogs, as though angered by the

momentary interruption, began to croak with redoubled force.

"When are you going, Buzyga?" asked the old man.

Buzyga raised his head and looked at the sky attentively.

"It's too early yet," said he, yawning. "I will go before morning. Right before dawn the peasants sleep like chickens. . . ."

Sleep was gradually overcoming Vasil. The earth began to quake under him, rising up and falling down, and then slowly floated away to one side. For an instant, when, with some difficulty, he opened his eyes, the boy saw the dark figures of three men, sitting silently side by side, but he no longer knew who they were and why they were sitting so close to him. Out of the bushes, where wild boars were crowding together, snorting and sniffing angrily, suddenly stepped into the clearing the son of the church elder, Zinka, and said, laughing: "Here are the horses, Vasil. Let's go out for a ride." Then they sat down together in a little sleigh and rushed off into the darkness at a very pleasant, rapid pace, following a narrow, white, silent road that wound among tall pine-trees. His grandfather ran after them waving his mutilated hands in the air, but could not catch up with them, and all this was extraordinarily joyful and funny. Little bells were tied to the horses' manes and tails, and also to the branches of the dark pine-trees, and a monotonous, hasty, and merry ringing sounded on all sides. . . . Then Vasil suddenly struck a dark, soft wall—and everything disappeared. . . .

The cold dampness which made his whole body shiver, woke him. It had become darker and the wind was blowing. Everything seemed to have changed suddenly. Large, black, fluffy clouds with dishevelled and chipped white edges were rushing past overhead, very low to the ground. The tops of the rushes, intertwined by the wind, were hastily bending down and trembling all over. . . . And the old willows, with their thin arms raised upward, were shaking in agitation from one side to the other as if they were trying to tell each other some terrible tidings, but could not do it.

The horse-thieves lay motionless and their bodies appeared black in the darkness. One of them was smoking, and his pipe flashed every little while. The red, momentary flashes ran over the bronzed faces, alternating with long, slanting shadows. The cold and the interrupted sleep gave the boy the sensation of being tired, indifferent, and upset. He listened without any interest to the low conversation of the horse-thieves and, with a dull feeling of outrage, felt that they were not in the least concerned with him, just as they were not concerned with the gigantic, rapidly fleeing clouds and the agitated willows. And that for which he had been preparing that night, and which had formerly filled his soul with excitement and pride, suddenly began to seem to him unnecessary, and small, and tiresome.

"You're still at it, like a big jackass," Buzyga was saying in a vexed tone. "What the deuce do I want your bay colt for? Why, they know him in every

village around here. A year ago I stole a riding-horse from the bookkeeper of the sugar-refinery. It was all one color, only the left front leg happened to be white; the devil take it! I tried to sell it everywhere, and they all made fun of me, as though I were a fool. 'We're not crazy yet,' they'd say to me. 'You can't sell this horse anywhere. Everybody in the province knows him.' And do you know, Kozel, what I sold it for? For a mug of sour milk. What are you whistling about? I'm telling you the truth. Volka Fishkin got it. He saw that my tongue was almost sticking out on account of the heat, and so he said to me: 'Look here, Buzyga, come inside and have a glass of milk.' I went in, and later on he says to me: 'Now listen, Buzyga, I always liked to deal with you, but it will take a fool to buy this horse from you. You'll have to leave it somewhere, in the evening, anyhow. Better give it to me. I'll take it over to the refinery and maybe I'll get a few pennies for it.' Well, I gave him the horse and he sold it later in the Podol Province, over at the Yarmolinetzk fair, for one hundred and thirty roubles. That's what you get out of stealing horses like that, Kozel."

"Ye-es. . . . That's so," said the old man slowly and thoughtfully, and chewed a little with his toothless gums. "Vikenty Sirota has fine dark horses. . . . And it's easy to get them, too. . . ."

"Vikenty. . . . Yes, that's so, of course. . . ." Buzyga agreed with him hesitatingly. "Vikenty, that's right. . . . Only, do you know, Kozel, that I hate to harm Vikenty? He is not very rich and always

treats you so well. How many times did it happen that my head would be aching like blazes, and when I'd say to him, 'Get us a drink, Vikenty,' he'd get it right off. No, I am sorry for Vikenty. . . ."

"Nonsense! Don't be sorry for anybody," said Akim Shpak angrily.

"No, you let Vikenty alone," ordered Buzyga firmly. "Any others?"

"Well. . . . Maybe Mikolo Grach?"

"Mikolo Grach? That's a different brand, only he is as crafty as the devil. Well, at any rate, we'll keep Grach in mind."

"You might get Andreyev's mare, that white one. It's a pretty good horse."

"Go to the devil with your white mare!" exclaimed Buzyga angrily. "It's old and the hair is falling out all over. That's the first sign. . . . Do you remember how Zhgun got caught with a white horse? Sh. . . . Keep quiet, Kozel." He waved his hand at the old man. "What's the matter with the boy over there?"

Vasil was wriggling on the ground, trying to curl up in such a way that as little as possible of the cold and dampness would reach him. His teeth were clattering.

"What is it, boy? What's the trouble?" he suddenly heard above his head. This was said in a deep voice that expressed an unaccustomed softness. The boy opened his eyes and saw Buzyga's large face bending over him.

"Wait a minute, I'll cover you," the horse-thief said, as he took off his coat. "Why didn't you say before that you were cold, you fool? Turn around a little . . . like that. . . ."

Buzyga tucked the coat around the boy solicitously, then sat down by his side and put his large, heavy hand on his shoulder. A feeling of inexpressible pleasure and gratitude trembled in Vasil's bosom, rose like a wave in his throat, and brought tears to his eyes. The coat was very large and very heavy. It was warm and smelled of healthy perspiration and tobacco. The boy soon felt the warmth spreading through his whole body. Curled up in a ball, his eyes tightly closed, he felt for Buzyga's large and pleasantly heavy hand, and touched it tenderly with his fingers. And again in his clouded consciousness the dark woods and the long white road began to rush by.

He fell fast asleep, so fast that when he opened his eyes it seemed to him that he had closed them only for an instant. But when he did open them, a thin, uncertain twilight was all around and the bushes and trees stood out against it as gray, cold spots. The wind had become stronger. As before, the tops of the rushes bent up and down, and the old willows swayed, but there was no longer anything terrifying or disquieting in this. A fog was rising over the river. Torn into slanting bands, bent over to one side, it was rushing rapidly over the woods, exhaling dampness.

Buzyga's face was almost blue with cold, but still merry. He touched lightly Vasil's shoulder and said in a singing voice, imitating the ringing of the bells:

"Priest, oh, priest!
Do you hear?
All the bells are ringing. . . ."

"Get up, boy," he said when his glance met Vasil's smiling eyes. "It's time to go. . . ."

Kozel emitted low, hollow coughs, covering his mouth with his sleeve and choking, as though he were vomiting. The color of his face was grayish-green, like that of a dead body. He waved his mutilated hands helplessly in Vasil's direction, but the cough prevented him from speaking. Finally, overcoming the paroxysm and still breathing heavily, he said: "So you'll take Buzyga through the Marinkino swamp over to Perebrod, Vasil. . . ."

"Yes, I know," interrupted the boy impatiently.

"You stop your blab for a minute," exclaimed the old man angrily, as a new fit of coughing again prevented him from speaking. "Look out when you get into the government woods. There is a deep bog there. See that you don't fall into a 'skylight.' . . ."

"Yes, I know. . . . You've told me that already. . . ."

"Let me finish. . . . Remember, don't go past the shack. Better go around the hill, because the working men get up earlier in the shack. And right near there a man will be holding four horses for you. So Buzyga will take three and you will ride the other one and go with him as far as Kreshevo. You do everything as Buzyga tells you. Don't be afraid. And when you come back and somebody asks you where you were, say that you went with your grandfather to the government woods to get some bast. Only, don't be afraid, Vasil. . . ."

"Oh, go to. . . . I am not afraid of anything,"

replied Vasil contemptuously, turning away from the old man. "Come on, Buzyga."

"Well, but you're a fiery one!" said Buzyga, laughing. "That's the way; give it to him, the old dog. . . . Now come, walk ahead."

Akim Shpak suddenly sniffed and began to strike the ground with his feet. His gloomy face was all wrinkled up after the sleepless night, and seemed turned to one side even more than ever. The whites of his black eyes were yellow and bloodshot, as though filled with dirty slime.

"We share half and half, Buzyga," said he gloomily; "we're not going to take advantage of you. You get half, and I, Kozel, and Cubik get the other half. . . . So don't try to bluff us. We'll find out anyway."

"All right, all right," said Buzyga carelessly. "Good-by."

"God be with you!" said Kozel.

Akim Shpak turned to the old man with his whole body, looked at him with hatred and contempt, and spat on the ground.

"You beggar!" he hissed through his clinched teeth.

V

Onisim Kozel lived with his grandson on the outskirts of the village, in a dilapidated little hut that seemed to have grown into the ground, with a broken flue and chipped whitewashing, behind which one could see the inner layer of yellow clay. The window-panes, for which rags were substituted in many places,

had become dull green with time and now shone with all the colors of the rainbow. Besides the two, the hut was inhabited by Prokhorovna, a deaf, hundred-year-old, insane woman. The three used the hut free of charge through the charity of their neighbors, especially since it was used for the performing of autopsies on suicides, the drowned, and murdered peasants. The very table at which the three village outlaws usually ate was used for the purposes of autopsy.

Vasil returned home tired and excited. Kozel was already there, lying on the stove, his head covered with a torn sheep-fur coat. The boy had succeeded in taking Buzyga safely as far as Perebrod. They had not been seen from the mill, although people were already stirring there and some wagons stood around. They had found the horses in the place indicated. There were four horses, but Cubik was not there. That circumstance disturbed Buzyga a great deal, so that he took with him only the two better horses, leaving the others tied to the post and ordered the boy to run home immediately and not along the road, but straight across the Marinkino swamp and through the government woods.

"Did Buzyga get scared?" asked Kozel hastily.

"No, he didn't get scared," answered Vasil, breathing with difficulty. "Only he was very angry, threatened to cut Cubik's throat. . . . And he got angry with me, too. . . . I said to him: 'It doesn't make any difference, Buzyga. I am not afraid. Let's take all the horses and go.' And he started shouting at me; I thought he'd beat me, so I ran away from him. . . ."

"And what about me? Did he ask you to tell me anything?"

"Yes. He said: 'You tell the old man to stay home all day long and not to stir out. And if anybody asks you about Buzyga or the horses, tell them you don't know anything about it. . . .'"

"What is it, O Lord?" exclaimed Kozel in a helpless, troubled voice.

Vasil was drinking water greedily out of a wooden dish.

"I guess they went after Buzyga," said he, raising his face from the dish for a moment. "When I was running across the swamp I heard a lot of people riding down the road, on horseback and in wagons."

The old man kept winking his red, wet eyes in confusion. His face was almost disfigured with fear, and one end of his mouth was twitching.

"Lie down, Vasil, lie down on the bed quickly!" he said in a broken voice. "Lie down quickly. O Lord, O Lord! Whose horses did he take? Did you see? Lie down, lie down!"

"One of them I did not know, but the other one was that roan mare of Kuzma Sotnik's. . . ."

"Kuzma's? O Lord! What are we going to do now? Didn't I ask Buzyga not to touch any horses from our village? There you are!"

Kozel breathed heavily, moving on top of the stove. "Don't forget, Vasil, that, if anybody asks you where we went, say that we went to the government woods for bast. And tell them that the guard took it away from us. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," said the boy roughly.

"O Lord, O Lord!" Kozel kept repeating. "It's impossible that Cubik betrayed me. He isn't that kind of a fellow. It's all Buzyga's fault, that iron head of his! What the deuce did he want to take the two horses for? You say there were a lot of people going down the road? O Lord, O Lord! That's the way he always is. Doesn't care for his own head and still less for another man's. Didn't he see, the rascal, that the thing was off? Why not run away? No, he was ashamed of the boy and had to show what a brave fellow he was. . . . O Lord, O Lord! . . . Are you asleep, Vasil?"

The boy kept an angry silence. The old man moved about for a long time, groaning and sighing, and talking to himself in a rapid, frightened whisper. He tried to assure himself that there was no danger at all, that Cubik's absence would be explained by and by as a mere accident, that the galloping riders of the road were simply an illusion of the frightened boy, and although he succeeded in deceiving his mind for a few short moments, he saw clearly and unmistakably in the depth of his soul that a terrible and inevitable death was moving toward him. At times he would break off his senseless whispering and listen with painful attention. And every rustle, every knock, or sound of a voice made him shiver and lie motionless. Once, when under the window a rooster crowed loudly and flapped his wings, the old beggar felt all the blood rushing from his head to his quivering heart, and his body became limp, and was covered with hot perspiration.

An hour went by. The sun rose from behind the yellow fields that stretched to the other side of the bridge. Two columns of merry, golden light in which numberless specks of dust were dancing joyfully, rushed in through the two windows of the dark, smoky hut, filled with an odor of sheep-fur and stale food. Suddenly Kozel threw the coat away and stood up on the stove. His old, colorless eyes were wide open and had an expression of mad fright. His blue lips were trembling, unable to pronounce the word.

"They are coming!" said he finally, through hiccoughs, shaking his head. "Vasil, they are coming. . . . Our death. . . . Vasil. . . ."

The boy already heard an indistinct, dull, low rumbling which rose and fell like wind-ridden waves, becoming more terrible and more distinct every moment. But it seemed that a far-away barrier held it back. But now this invisible wall suddenly gave way and the sounds rushed from behind it with terrible force.

"They are coming here. They will kill us, Vasil!" cried Kozel wildly.

Now one could hear the sound of a vast crowd of people, frenzied and blinded by the cruel, unbounded, merciless peasant wrath, running down the street, shouting fiercely, and stamping with their heavy, iron-shod boots.

"Drag them over here! Break the door!" howled under the very window of the hut some one's voice, and it had not a single human tone in it.

The unlocked door, torn off its hinges, opened and

struck against the wall, while a black, shouting crowd rushed into the bright oblong formed by its opening. Their faces disfigured with anger, pushing and shoving each other without noticing it, dozens of frenzied men rushed into the hut, forced in from behind. Dishevelled, frenzied faces were looking in through the window, darkening the room and preventing the golden columns of dust from entering.

Vasil sat motionless with his back pressed against the wall, pale and trembling but not frightened. He saw the sheep-fur coat fly down from the stove, and directly after it came Kozel helplessly flying over the heads of the crowd. The old beggar was shouting something, opening wide his toothless mouth, twitching his face into shameless contortions of cringing terror, which made his whole wrinkled face horribly disgusting. He waved his mutilated hands, pointing them at the image, hastily making the sign of the cross, and striking his bosom with them. And from all sides men rushed upon him, their bloodshot eyes almost glassy with anger, their lips twisted out of shape by their mad shouting. The old man was twirling in the midst of their hot, sweating bodies like a splinter of wood in a whirlpool.

"Kill him! Kill him! The scoundrel! No, you won't get away! Tsypenuk, give it to him! Drag him out into the street, boys, drag him out! You've pestered us long enough. We'll bury you alive! . . . Kill him!" was heard as separate exclamations in the midst of the general uproar.

Suddenly, covering all this tempest of curses and

vituperations, was heard the mighty voice of Kuzma Sotnik, who shouted, towering above the crowd, his face red with the effort.

"Wait a moment, brethren, we have to investigate this. Take him over to where Buzyga is!"

"Drag him! Take him! Let's put an end to them all! . . ."

With the same elemental impetuosity with which it rushed into the hut, the crowd now surged back into the street. Somebody picked up Vasil and threw him into this crowd of wriggling bodies. Crushed in on all sides, deafened by the noise, he was thrown outside by this rushing current.

The village presented an unusual, peculiar sight on that beautiful summer morning. Despite the fact that it was a working day, in the middle of the week, the streets were crowded with people. And wagons and ploughs with horses already harnessed, stood abandoned in front of almost every gate. Children and women were running in one direction, toward the church. Dogs barked all around; hens cackled, flapping their wings and flying to all sides. The crowd was growing fast and occupied the whole width of the street. Crowded in a dense mass, half suffocated, constantly pushing and shoving each other, these men were running along, shouting hoarsely, their mouths foaming as though they were a pack of wild beasts.

On a little meadow in front of the wine-shop, there was a dense, black ring of people. The two crowds joined together, mingled, and pressed against each

other. Some monstrously elastic force threw Kozel and Vasil forward.

In the middle of a narrow spot instinctively set apart by the crowd, Buzyga was lying on the grass, which was wet and dark with blood. His face had the appearance of a large piece of bloody meat, torn to shreds. One of his eyes was torn out and was hanging on something that looked like a red rag. The other eye was closed. What had been his nose was now a large bloody, round cake. His mustaches were covered with blood. But what was most terrible, inexpressibly terrible, was the fact that this mutilated and disfigured man was lying on the ground in silence, while around him the wild crowd was shouting and howling, intoxicated with cruelty.

Kuzma Sotnik caught Kozel by the collar of his coat and bent him down with such force that the old man fell on his knees.

"Hey, there! Quiet!" shouted Kuzma, turning around. "Keep quiet there!"

He was the leader on that day and his word was obeyed. The crowd's roar gradually died away, as though running back from rank to rank.

"Buzyga!" shouted Kuzma when silence set in, bending low over the horse-thief. "Do you hear me? We won't beat you any more. Will you tell me truly whether Kozel was with you or not?"

Buzyga remained silent and did not open his one eye. His chest rose often and so high that it seemed impossible for a man to breathe in that way, and each breath made something whistle in his throat, as though

a fluid were flowing with difficulty through a narrow tube.

"Don't try to bluff us, you devil!" shouted Kuzma threateningly, and raising his foot, he struck Buzyga on the lower part of the chest with all the force of his iron-shod boot.

"Ukh!" the whole crowd sighed in unison, heavily and greedily.

Buzyga groaned and opened his eye slowly. It fell on Vasil's face.

Buzyga looked at the boy slowly for a long time, closely and indifferently, and then it suddenly seemed to Vasil that the bloody mouth of the horse-thief twisted into a suffering, tender smile, and this seemed so unnatural, so pitiful, and so dreadful that Vasil cried involuntarily, and covered his face with his hands.

"Now, tell us, you Satan!" Sotnik shouted this in Buzyga's ear. "Listen. If you will tell us who helped you, we'll let you go immediately. Otherwise, we'll kill you like a dog. Am I telling the truth or not, boys? Tell him. . . ."

"That's right. . . . Tell us, Buzyga, and we won't do anything else to you," rumbled through the crowd like a dull wave of sound.

Buzyga looked at Vasil with that same long and peculiar gaze and, opening with difficulty his mutilated lips, said in a scarcely audible voice:

"No one . . . was there. . . . I was alone. . . ."

He closed his eye and his chest began to rise and fall.

"Kill him!" came a tremulous, nervous, half-childish voice, shrieking somewhere in the back ranks.

The crowd moved forward, howled dully, and closed in on the spot where the horse-thief was lying.

Without rising, Kozel dragged himself over to where Kuzma was standing and threw his arms about his feet.

"My benefactor!" he was saying senselessly and entreatingly. "See, I kiss your feet. . . . God knows that I was home all the time. I went for some bast. . . . God knows and the Holy Virgin. My benefactors! Here I kiss your feet! . . . I am only a poor cripple. . . ."

And he was really dragging himself around on his knees, holding on to Kuzma's boot and kissing it in such frenzy as though his whole safety lay in this. Kuzma slowly turned around and looked at the crowd.

"Let him go to the devil!" said an old man standing there.

"To the devil with him!" caught up several voices. "Maybe it wasn't he. It was a Kreshevo horse anyway! What's the use? Let Kozel go. . . . We'll ask the elder afterward."

Kozel was still dragging himself on his knees from one peasant to another. The terror of the imminent and cruel death had now changed to delirious joy. He pretended that he did not understand what was going on. Tears were running down his horribly twisted face. He caught the hands and the boots of the peasants and kissed them greedily. Vasil stood to one side, pale and motionless, with his eyes burning. He could not turn his face away from Buzyga's terrible face, seeking yet fearing his glance.

"Go away!" Kuzma Sotnik suddenly said and

kicked the old man in the back with his boot. "You go away too, Vasil! Buzyga!" he shouted almost immediately, turning to the dying horse-thief, "do you hear? I am asking you for the last time: 'Who was with you?'"

The crowd moved in again. The same force that threw Kozel and the boy forward was now bearing them back, and the people whom they met turned away, made room for them impatiently, as if they were disturbing their strained attention. Through the soft and dense barrier of human bodies, Vasil heard the loud bass of Kuzma who was still questioning Buzyga. Suddenly the same thin, hysterical voice shouted almost above Vasil's head: "Kill Buzyga! . . ."

All those who were standing behind pushed forward, shoving in those before them. Kozel and Vasil found themselves outside of the crowd.

"Lord be praised!" the old man muttered joyously, drying his tears with one of his stumps and making the sign of the cross with the other. "Vasil, Vasil! O Lord! We have escaped! . . . Vasil! O Lord! . . . We have escaped! Why do you stand there? Let's run home!"

"You go; I won't," said Vasil gloomily.

It seemed that it was outside of his power to draw his burning eyes away from the black, motionless, and dreadfully silent crowd. His blue lips trembled and became distorted, as they whispered unintelligible words.

"Let's go, Vasil!" Kozel entreated him, dragging his grandson by the hand.

At that moment the black mass suddenly quivered and swayed like a forest that was suddenly struck by the wind. A dull and short groan of fury rolled over it. In an instant it pressed together, then tore apart again, then pressed together once more. And deafening each other with their frenzied cries, the men mingled together in the horrible fray.

"Vasil, for God's sake!" the old man muttered, "let's go away. . . . They will kill us!"

It was with great difficulty that he succeeded in dragging the boy away from the mob, but on the corner, struck by the dead silence that suddenly set in, Vasil drew away and glanced back.

"O Lord have mercy on thy sinful slave, Levonty, and take him to Paradise," Kozel suddenly began to whisper. "They have killed Buzyga," he said with pretended sadness.

He knew that the people's wrath was allayed with blood and that death had gone past him. He could not conceal his deep, animal joy. He alternately cried and laughed with noiseless, long laughter. He spoke feverishly, without pauses, without sense, and made idiotic faces at himself. Vasil looked at him from time to time in aversion, knitting his brows with an expression of deep hatred.

THE JEWESS

"WE have gone past, we have gone past!" a childish voice rang out piteously. "To the right!" some one shouted behind, in an angry bass. "To the right, right, right!" somebody caught up in front, hastily and merrily. Somebody ground his teeth, somebody whistled loudly. . . . A pack of dogs began to bark in a high and merry pitch. "Ho-ho-ho! Ha-ha-ha!" the crowd laughed and groaned.

The sleigh struck a rut and jumped up. Kashintzev opened his eyes.

"What is it?" he asked in fright.

But the road was as silent and as deserted as before. The cold night was still, as it hung over the endless, dead, white fields. The full moon was standing in the centre of the sky, and a distinct, blue shadow that glided along by the side of the sleigh, breaking up the piles of snow, was short and ugly. The hard, dry snow was squeaking and whining under the runners, as though it were made of rubber.

"Oh, it's the snow," thought Kashintzev. "Isn't it strange?" he said aloud.

Hearing his voice, the driver turned around. His dark face, with its beard and mustaches whitened by the cold, resembled a large, rough, animal mask, with pieces of cotton glued to it.

"What? Two versts. It isn't far," said he.

"It is only the snow," thought Kashintzev, again beginning to doze. "It is only the snow. Isn't that strange?"

"Strange, strange!" The little bell attached to the end of the shaft suddenly rang out hastily and distinctly. "Strange, strange, strange. . . ."

"Ay-ay-ay! Look at that!" shouted a woman who was walking in front of the sleigh. The crowd which was coming toward her suddenly began to speak, cry, and sing. Again the dogs began to bark angrily.

The signal of the locomotive was heard far ahead. . . . And immediately through his drowsiness, Kashintzev recalled with remarkable distinctness the railroad-station restaurant with its pitiful, dusty luxury, its electric lamps hung under the dirty ceiling and on the stained walls, the enormous windows, the artificial palms standing on the table, the stiff, upright napkins, the vases, the bouquets of dried grass, the pyramids of bottles, the pink and green wine-glasses. . . .

It was on the night before that a few of his friends gathered to see Kashintzev off, as he was leaving for his new position—to be assistant surgeon of an infantry regiment stationed somewhere in an out-of-the-way place. There were five of them. Bringing the heavy chairs around the corner table, which was usually used by physicians, they drank beer and conversed with artificial sincerity and assumed liveliness, as though they were going through a theatrical performance. The handsome and self-confident Rul, his eyes glistening unnaturally, looking around to see

that everybody in the room heard him, said in a tone of fatuous familiarity:

"So it goes, old man. Our whole life from birth to death consists of meeting each other and then separating again. You might put that down in a book entitled, 'The Evening Aphorisms and Maxims of Doctor Von Rul.'"

Immediately after he had finished, a fat official with a face that reminded one of an angry bulldog, appeared in the doorway, shook a bell, and then shouted in a singing tone, breaking off and choking every little while:

"First be-ell. Ki-ev, Zhmerinka, Odessa. The train sta-ands on track number two."

And now, riding in this uncomfortable and bumping sleigh, Kashintzev laughed merrily as he thought of how distinct and detailed were his recollections. But almost immediately the tiresome, sickening impressions of the endless monotony of his journey returned to him. It was only about six or seven hours since he had started out of the small railroad-station to which his train brought him, embarking upon this sleigh journey, but it seemed to Kashintzev that he had been riding that way for weeks and months, that he himself had already changed, had become older, more wearied, and more indifferent to everything around him than he was the night before. Somewhere on his way he had met a beggar, drunk and ragged, with an ugly hole instead of a nose, and with his shoulder bare despite the cold; somewhere a long, thin horse with chocolate-colored hair that was as

thick as velvet, stubbornly refused to be harnessed; somebody a long, long time ago, it seemed, had said to him good-naturedly, "The road is fine to-day, sir, you won't notice how you'll cover it," while Kashintzev himself was at that very moment looking at the snow-covered plain, reddened by the setting sun. But all this mingled together and appeared to be at some dim, incredible distance, and it was impossible to recall, where, when, and in what sequence these events took place. At times a light slumber would overcome Kashintzev, and then in his clouded consciousness he would hear strange howls, the barking of dogs, cries and laughter and muttering, but as soon as he would open his eyes these fantastic sounds would immediately become transformed into the plain squeaking of the runners and the ringing of the bells on the shafts. And again, as before, the sleeping, white fields stretched to the right and to the left; again, before him was the black, bent back of the driver, and again the horses moved on monotonously, their tails tied in a knot that swung from side to side.

"Where do you want to go, straight to the post-house or to the lodging-house?" asked the driver.

Kashintzev raised his head. Now the sleigh was going down a long, straight street of a village. The road, already trampled down, shone in the moonlight like a highly polished blade of steel. On either side dark, pitiful huts, pressed down from above by heavy snow caps, were scarcely visible in the midst of snow piles. The village seemed dead; no dogs were barking, no light was seen in the windows, and no passers-by

were in sight. There was something fearful and sad in this silence of human habitations, lost in the deep snow, and pressing together in fright.

"The lodging-place? What's that?" asked Kashintzev.

"Don't you know? The lodging-place that Movsha Khatzkel keeps. . . . The passengers always stay there. You can get tea there or an omelet or something like that. . . . You can even spend the night there. . . . There are five rooms for guests. . . ."

"All right, take me there," agreed Kashintzev.

Only now that he began to think of food and of the warm house, Kashintzev felt for the first time how cold and hungry he was. And the low, dark, snow-covered houses were running toward him and disappeared behind him, and it seemed that there was no end to them.

"Aren't we ever going to get there?" Kashintzev asked impatiently.

"Oh, yes, very soon. It's a big village. More than two versts and a half long. . . . Come along now!" shouted the driver in a hoarse and terrible voice as he stood up in the sleigh, swung his whip over the horses' heads, and tugged at the reins.

A bright, red point appeared at a distance, growing larger and brighter, now concealed behind some unseen dark barriers, now appearing again for an instant amidst the surrounding darkness. Finally, the horses, as though they were mechanical toys whose springs had become unwound to the end, stopped of their own accord before the gates of the lodging-house and

immediately lowered their heads almost to the ground, evidently exhausted by the long journey. The arched semicircular entrance extended like an immense black, gaping corridor through the whole length of the house; but beyond it, in the yard, one could see by the glittering light of the moon, dark wagons with their shafts lifted up, bundles of straw lying on the snow, and the silhouettes of horses standing in open sheds. On each side of the gates there was a window covered with the snow, but still shining with a warm, scarcely visible light.

Some one opened the door, which squeaked shrilly on its hinges, and Kashintzev entered the room. The white clouds of cold air, which, it seemed, were only waiting for the opportunity, rushed in behind him, whirling madly. At first Kashintzev could not see anything, as his eye-glasses immediately became covered with moisture and he saw nothing before him but two dimly shining circles, glistening with all the colors of the rainbow.

The driver, who had entered behind him, shouted:

"Hey there, Movsha, a gentleman is here. . . . Where are you?"

A short, stocky Jew with a light beard suddenly appeared from somewhere. He wore a high cap and a knit vest of the color of tobacco. He was still chewing something and was hastily drying his mouth with his hand.

"Good evening, sir, good evening," said he in a friendly tone and immediately began to shake his head and smack his lips with an expression of deep sympathy

and solicitude on his face. "My, my, my. . . . The gentleman is almost frozen to death, God forbid. Let me have your coat, please; I'll hang it on a nail. Will you have a samovar? Or something to eat, perhaps? My, how cold you are!"

"Thank you, I'll have something to eat," said Kashintzev. He was still so cold that he could hardly move his lips. His chin became almost immovable, as though it were not his, and his feet seemed to him soft and weak and unfeeling, as though they were made of cotton.

When the moisture had disappeared from his eyeglasses he began to look around. It was a large room with a bent window and an earthen floor. The wall was washed with light-blue lime, chipped off in many places and disclosing a worn-off lath-work of shingles. Along the walls stood narrow benches and crooked tables with their tops wet and greasy through long use. A large lamp was burning under the very ceiling. The back part of the room was partitioned off by a calico curtain, from behind which came the smell of dirty bedding, of children's clothes, and a pungent odor of some spiced food. In front of the curtain stood a wooden counter.

At one of the tables, standing directly before Kashintzev, stood a peasant in a brown coat and sheepfur cap, his dishevelled head resting on the palms of his hands. He was drunk and was moving his head from side to side helplessly, hiccoughing and muttering something in an overstrained, hoarse, rattling voice.

"Can you give me something to eat?" asked Kashintzev. "I am very hungry."

Khatzkel raised his shoulders a little, spread out his arms, screwed up his left eye, and remained in that position for a few seconds.

"What will I give you to eat?" asked he with a sly expression on his face. "And what will you have? You can get anything. I can get you a samovar, or boil you some eggs, or get some milk. Of course you know that one cannot get much in a small place like this. We can roast you a chicken, too; only that would take too long."

"Let me have some eggs and some milk. What else will you give me?"

"What else?" asked Khatzkel, as though astonished. "Of course I can offer you some fish prepared our way. But maybe you don't like Jewish cooking? You know it is just ordinary stuffed fish that my wife is getting ready for Saturday."

"Let me have some fish, too, and a glass of whiskey, please."

The Jew closed both his eyes, shook his head, and smacked his lips with regret.

"We have no whiskey," he whispered. "You know that it is not allowed now. Are you going far?"

"To Gusyatin."

"And, if I may ask, you are not a police official, are you?"

"No, I am a physician. A military surgeon."

"Oh, a doctor! I am very glad of that. Believe me, I am very sorry that I cannot get you any whiskey.

Still, let me see. . . . Etlya!" shouted Khatzkel, walking away from the table. "Etlya!"

He disappeared behind the curtain and began to talk rapidly in Yiddish, as though he were angry. Several times in succession he appeared in the larger room and disappeared again as though he were in a hurry. At that moment the peasant, who was lounging at the table, suddenly raised his head with its open, moist lips and glassy eyes and began to sing in a hoarse voice while something snapped and rattled in his throat:

"Oh, if we only could . . ."

Khatzkel ran over to him and began to shake him by the shoulder.

"Trokhim. . . . Listen, Trokhim. . . . Didn't I ask you not to make any disturbance here? See, the gentleman is offended. . . . You have had your drink. Now go home, Trokhim!"

"Jews!" suddenly roared the peasant in a terrible voice and struck the table with his fist. "You Jews, the devil take you! I'll kill you!"

His head again fell on the table, and he began to mutter something.

Khatzkel jumped away from the table, his face perfectly pale. His lips were twitching in a contemptuous and at the same time confused and impotent smile.

"Now you see, doctor, how I earn my living!" he said bitterly, turning to Kashintzev. "Well, now, tell me what can I do with a man like this! What can I

do? Etlya!" shouted he in the direction of the curtain. "When are you going to get that fish ready?"

He dived again into the curtained-off part of the room, but returned almost immediately carrying a platter on which lay a fish cut into thin slices with a dark sauce poured over it. He also brought with him a half-loaf of white bread with a hard outer crust, shaped in a twist and covered with black seeds of some aromatic spice.

"Doctor," said Khatzkel mysteriously, "my wife found a little whiskey back there. Try it, it's good fruit-whiskey. We drink it at our Easter time, and it is even called Easter brandy; here it is."

He took out of his waistcoat a small bottle with a narrow neck, and a wine-glass, and placed them on the table before Kashintzev. The brandy had a yellowish color and a slight odor of cognac, but when the doctor had swallowed a glass of it, it seemed to him that his whole mouth and throat became filled with some burning and aromatic vapor. Almost immediately he felt a cold sensation in his stomach, then the coldness turned into warmth, and he felt acute hunger. The fish proved to be very palatable and so spicy that it pinched his tongue.

"How is it prepared, I wonder?" An anxious thought rushed through Kashintzev's mind, but he immediately began to laugh, recalling one of the familiar evening aphorisms of Doctor Von Rul: "One should never think of what one eats or whom one loves."

Khatzkel was standing a little to one side, his hands behind his back. As though divining Kashintzev's thought, he said in a complacent, subservient tone:

"Maybe you think that it wasn't prepared clean? Oh, no, never! Our Jewish women do everything in accordance with the Holy Books, and you have all the directions there how to clean, how to cut, how to wash your hands. And if something is not done that way, we consider it a sin. You don't have to worry about that. Etlya, bring some more fish."

A woman appeared from behind the curtain and stood back of the counter, a large shawl thrown over her shoulders and partly over her head. When Kashintzev turned his face toward her it seemed to him that some invisible force suddenly struck him on the chest and some one's cold hand grasped his beating heart. Never before had he seen such resplendent, haughty, perfect beauty, nor even dared to think that it existed. Whenever he had happened to see beautiful faces on the paintings of famous artists he was always firmly convinced that such correct, faultlessly beautiful faces do not exist in nature, that they are merely figments of the artist's creative imagination. And all the more amazing, all the more incredible to him was this blindingly beautiful face which he now saw in the dirty lodging-house, all filled with the odor of filth, in this cold room, back of the wooden counter, but a few steps away from the drunken, snoring, and hiccoughing peasant.

"Who is this?" Kashintzev whispered as though to himself. "Who is this . . ." he was going to say,

"Jewess," according to his custom, but stopped in time and said, "this woman?"

"Who? This?" said Khatzkel indifferently, making a motion with his head. "Why, that's my wife."

"How beautiful she is!"

Khatzkel burst into a short laugh and then shrugged his shoulders with contempt.

"Are you making fun of me?" asked he in a tone of slight reproach. "What is she? Just an ordinary, poor Jewess. That's all. Didn't you see really beautiful women in the large cities? Etlya!" He suddenly turned to his wife and said something rapidly in Yiddish. She laughed, disclosing a row of white, even teeth, and raised one shoulder so high that it seemed as if she wanted to brush it against her cheek.

"And is the gentleman single or married?" asked Khatzkel with insinuating cautiousness.

"I'm single. Why?"

"Oh, I just asked. . . . So you are single. And why, if I may ask, did not the gentleman who is so dignified and well educated wish to get married?"

"Well, it's a long story. . . . All sorts of reasons. And then, I guess it isn't too late even now. I'm not so very old, eh?"

Suddenly Khatzkel moved close to the doctor, and said, looking around cautiously and lowering his voice significantly:

"And maybe the gentleman will spend the night here? You needn't be afraid, the best gentlemen always stop here with me; Mr. Varpakhovsky from

Monastyrishche, and Mr. Lutzky, and officers, too, sometimes. . . ."

"No, I have to go. I am in a hurry."

But Khatzkel, with a sly, penetrating, and tempting air, continued to insist:

"I assure you it would be better for you to stay, doctor. Where will you go in such awful cold? May I not live till to-morrow, if I am lying! And listen to me, doctor. . . . There is a former governess here. . . ."

A fleeting, mad thought flashed through Kashintzev's mind. He threw a rapid, stealthy look at Etlya, who, pretending that she did not know of what her husband and the traveller were talking, was looking indifferently at the snow-covered window. But at that moment Kashintzev experienced a strong feeling of shame.

"That's enough, go away!" he ordered Khatzkel sternly.

Not so much by his words, but by the whole expression of his face, Kashintzev understood what Khatzkel was referring to, but he could not become angry, as he, no doubt, would have considered it his duty to become had this taken place under different circumstances. The warmth of the room, especially after his long journey in the cold, had affected him and made him feel a slight weakness all over his body. The whiskey he had drunk made him just a little dizzy, and his face glowed pleasantly. What he was craving for at that moment was to be able to sit indefinitely, without stirring, experiencing that languid feeling of

satiety, warmth, and slight intoxication, and not to think that a few minutes later he would have to get into his sleigh again and resume his endless, monotonous, cold journey.

And in that strange, light, and blissful condition, he felt an inexpressible joy in occasionally, as though by accident, and deceiving himself into the thought that it was accidental, resting his gaze on the beautiful face of the Jewess, and to think about her, but not with thoughts, rather with words, as though he were conversing with some unseen companion.

"Can you describe this face to another?" Kashintzev was saying in his mind. "Can you describe in the ordinary, poor, every-day language those amazing features, those delicate and bright tints? Now she has again turned to me, almost with her full face. How clear, how amazingly delicate is that line which runs from her temple to her ear, and then down to the chin, outlining the cheek. The forehead is low, overgrown on the sides of the temples with light, fluffy hair. How beautiful this is, how feminine, how colorful! Her eyes are enormous and black, so enormous and black that they seem to have been drawn, while around the pupils shine transparent dots of living gold, like bright beams in a yellow topaz. The eyes are surrounded with a dark, slightly moist shadow, and this dark tone, that lends her gaze an air of indolence and passion, merges almost imperceptibly into the swarthy, healthy glow of her cheeks. Her lips are full, red, and, although closed at this moment, they seem open, craving for a kiss, while on the slightly

shaded upper lip there is a pretty little black mole, near the corner of the mouth. How straight, how noble is her nose, and how thin, how haughty her nostrils! Oh, how beautiful she is!" Kashintzev repeated this to himself, and he felt a desire to weep for the joy and the tenderness that suddenly took possession of him—pressing his bosom and almost bringing tears to his eyes.

Over the bright roses of her dark complexion one could see streaks of dried dirt, but it seemed to Kashintzev that no carelessness could possibly dim or detract from her glorious, triumphant beauty. He also noted that when she came from behind the counter, the bottom of her short, pink calico skirt was wet and heavy with mud, while on her feet were enormous, shabby shoes with outstanding flaps; he saw that when she spoke with her husband she pulled the tip of her nose with two fingers, emitting an indefinite sound, and then drew her index-finger across her nostrils. And yet nothing vulgar, nothing ludicrous and pitiful, could detract one mite from her perfect beauty.

"What is happiness?" Kashintzev asked himself, and then immediately replied: "The only happiness is to possess a woman like this, to know that this divine beauty is yours. Hm. . . . 'To possess' is a vulgar word that a hussar would use, but what is one's career, ambition, philosophy, fame, convictions, public questions in comparison with this? A year or two will go by, and perhaps I shall be married. My wife will be of a noble family, a lean, blond girl with thin curls on her head, well educated and quite hysterical, with

a narrow pelvis and a cold, bluish, pimpled skin; she will play the piano, discuss all sorts of problems, suffer all kinds of woman's diseases, and we both will probably feel a sexual indifference, if not actual aversion to each other. And who knows? Perhaps the whole purpose, the whole reason, the whole joy of my life is to take possession, by means fair or foul, of a woman like this: to steal her, take her away, tempt her—what difference does it make how? Let her be filthy, ignorant, unrefined, greedy—good Lord! How insignificant are all these trifles in comparison with her marvellous beauty!"

Khatzkel approached him again, stopped near Kashintzev, put his hands in his pockets and sighed.

"Maybe you have read what they write in the papers?" he asked with polite caution. "Anything new about the war?"

"Nothing has changed. We are defeated at every step, still retreating. . . . However, I have not seen to-day's paper," replied Kashintzev.

"You have not read! Isn't that too bad? We live in a wilderness here and know nothing of what is going on in the world. They wrote something about the Zionists. You've read about the congress that's going to meet at Paris, haven't you?"

"Yes, of course."

Kashintzev looked at him more attentively. Watching him, one could feel under his external quickness and readiness something that spoke of weariness, weakness, poverty, oppression, malnutrition. The most pitiful impression was produced by his long neck

that extended out of his knit scarf. It was thin, of dirty-yellow color; on each side of the throat, like a thick cord, stretched a long, swollen vein, with an indentation in the middle.

"How do you make your living here?" asked Kashintzev, suddenly seized with pity, and feeling as though he had been at fault.

"Well," Khatzkel shrugged his shoulders with an expression of hopelessness and contempt. "What can a poor Jew do in the Pale? Get along some way or other. On the market-days we buy and sell, snatching the last piece of bread from each other. Oh, well! What's the use of talking? As though anybody is interested in knowing how we suffer here! . . ."

He dropped his hand wearily and went behind the curtain, while Kashintzev returned again to his broken chain of thought. Those thoughts of his were like the moving, many-colored half-words, half-images, that come to a man in the morning, when he is on the border between sleep and wakefulness, and which, until he is entirely awake, seem so thin, so obediently light, and, at the same time, so full of the profoundest importance.

Never did Kashintzev experience such pleasure in dreaming as now, when under the influence of warmth and satiety, he sat with his back against the wall, with his legs stretched out before him. A large part in this pleasure of his was played by an indefinite point in the design of the bright curtain. Whenever he would find it and his eyes linger on it, his thoughts would immediately begin to flow evenly, freely, and

clearly, without tarrying in his head, leaving no traces in it and bringing with them some quiet, tinkling joy. Then everything would disappear in a bluish, trembling haze: the walls of the guest-room, the crooked tables, the dirty counter. Only the beautiful face still remained, and Kashintzev saw it and felt it, although what he was actually looking at was an indefinite point, utterly unknown to him.

"How remarkable, how incomprehensible is this Hebrew people!" thought Kashintzev. "What trials does fate still hold in store for it? It has gone through tens of centuries, without mixing with any others, disdainfully isolating itself from other nations, preserving in its heart its age-long sorrow and its age-long flame. The variegated, colossal life of Rome and Greece and Egypt has long, long become the possession of museum collections, a delirium of history, a far-away tale, but this mysterious people, which was already a patriarch in the days of their infancy, not only exists, but has preserved everywhere its strong, fiery, southern type, its faith, full of great hopes and trifling customs—has preserved the holy language of its divinely inspired books, has preserved its mystical alphabet, the very tracings of which breathe of thousand-year-old antiquity! What was the story of its youth? With whom did it trade, conclude treaties, wage war? Nowhere have any traces remained of all those problematic Philistines, Amalekites, Moabites, and other half-mythical peoples, while it still lives, elastic and immortal, as though fulfilling some superhuman preordainment. Its history is full of tragic horror and is

all covered with its own blood; enslavement that lasted for centuries, violence, hatred, tortures, bonfires of human flesh, banishment, arbitrary oppression. . . . How could it remain alive? Or are there really some mysterious purposes, unintelligible to us, in the fate of nations? Who knows? Perhaps some Higher Force has willed that the Hebrews, after losing their own native land, should play the part of eternal yeast in the gigantic process of the world fermentation?

"Here is this woman in whose face there is reflected that divine beauty which inspires with holy rapture. For how many centuries did this people have to abstain from intermingling with other nations in order to preserve these marvellous Biblical features? With just such a plain kerchief on her head, with just such deep eyes and a fold of sorrow near her lips, is the mother of Jesus Christ pictured in our representations of her. With the same faultlessly pure beauty shone gloomy Judith, and meek Ruth, and gentle Leah, and beautiful Rachel, and Agar, and Sarah. Looking at her, you believe, feel, and almost see how this people ascends in its dizzying genealogy to Moses, rises up to Abraham, and still higher and higher to the great, terrible, vengeful, Biblical God himself!

"With whom did I argue recently?" suddenly recalled Kashintzev. "It was about the Jews. I guess it was with the colonel of the General Staff in the railroad-train. Or was it with the municipal physician from Stepan? He said: 'The Jews have grown enfeebled, the Jews have lost their nationality and their native land, the Jewish people must degenerate, as

not a single drop of fresh blood reaches it. One of two alternatives remains for it: either to merge with the other nations and become lost in their midst, or to perish. . . .' At that time I could find no arguments to oppose him, but now I would have brought him to this woman standing behind the counter and would have said to him: 'Here is the guarantee of the immortality of the Hebrew people!' Let Khatzkel be weak, and pitiful, and sickly; let it be that his ceaseless struggle with life has stamped his face with the cruel traces of rascality, timidity, and lack of confidence; for thousands of years he has been 'getting on somehow or other,' gasping for breath in the ghettos of the world. But the Jewish woman preserves the spirit and the type of the race, bears, gently and carefully, through streams of blood, under the oppression of violence, the sacred fire of the people's genius and will never let it die out. Now I look at her and feel that beyond her the black abyss of ages opens before me. There is a miracle here, a divine mystery. And I, myself—a savage but yesterday, if a cultured man to-day—what significance do I have in her eyes—what significance do I have next to this living enigma, perhaps the most inexplicable and the greatest in the whole history of mankind?"

Suddenly Kashintzev awoke. There was excitement in the room. Khatzkel rushed from window to window and, with his hands against his temples, tried to see something in the darkness beyond the panes. Etlya was pulling the drunken peasant by the collar of his coat, with an expression of aversion and anger

on her face, while he now raised, now lowered his red, insensible face bloated with sleep, with pouches under his eyes, and made a wild, rattling noise in his throat.

"Listen now, Trokhim! Listen! I ask you to get up!" the Jewess said impatiently in a corrupted Little-Russian dialect.

"Sh-sh! The police commissary!" suddenly came from Khatzkel in a frightened whisper. He smacked his lips rapidly, shook his head in despair, then, rushing to the door, opened it just at the moment when a tall police official entered it, and freed his head from the thick sheep-fur collar of his coat.

"Now listen, Trokhim. Get up!" exclaimed Etlya in a tragic whisper.

The peasant raised his bloodshot face, and with his mouth slanting to one side, roared:

"*Oh, if we only could . . .*"

"What's this?" shouted the official, rolling his eyes threateningly. He threw his sheep-fur coat in rage into Khatzkel's hands and, swelling out his chest, made a step or two forward, in the magnificent style of an opera generalissimo.

The peasant rose from his seat, his hands, feet, and whole body catching against the table. Something like conscious fear came over his bluish, bloated face.

"Your Hono . . . your . . . Hono . . ." he began to mutter, still standing on the same spot in indecision.

"Get out!" suddenly roared the official in such a thunderous voice that the nervous Kashintzev shuddered at his table. "Get right out of here!"

The peasant made an attempt to move forward and extended his hands to catch the official's hand and kiss it, but Khatzkel was already dragging him toward the door by the collar of his coat.

"So!" the official continued to rage, his eyes still sparkling with anger as he turned to Etlya. "Selling brandy without permission? Receiving horse-thieves? Just wait! I'll . . ."

The woman raised high her shoulders, bent her head to one side, and closed her eyes with a pitiful and submissive expression, as though awaiting a blow from above. Kashintzev felt that the chain of his light, pleasant, and important thoughts had suddenly broken, never to be reunited, and he was ill at ease, ashamed of himself because of those thoughts.

"May God strike me on the spot, your Honor!" Etlya was swearing with passionate persuasiveness. "May I be struck blind, and not be able to see tomorrow and my own children! Your Honor knows yourself. . . . Well, what can I do when a drunken peasant comes here? My husband is a sickly man, and I am a weak, poor woman."

"All right," the official interrupted her sternly. "That's enough."

At that moment he noticed Kashintzev and immediately turned toward him, throwing his head back with a victorious and stern expression, threw his chest forward and brushed his fine, light beard to the right and to the left. But suddenly a smile appeared on his face.

"Basil Basilich! My dear old crocodile! What

wind carried you here?" exclaimed he in a theatrically joyful tone. "The devil knows how long I have not seen you! . . . Oh, I beg your pardon!" He suddenly paused at the table. "I must have made a mistake."

He touched the visor of his cap with his hand. Half rising from his seat, Kashintzev did the same, though rather clumsily.

"I beg your pardon. . . . I took you for my colleague, the commissary at Pochaynov. Such a fatal coincidence. Once more, I beg your pardon. . . . However, you know, there is such a remarkable similarity of form that. . . . Still, permit me to introduce myself: the local police commissary, and, so to speak, the god of thunder, Pavel Afinogenych Irisov."

Kashintzev rose again and introduced himself.

"Well, if it has all occurred in such an extraordinary fashion, won't you permit me to join you?" said Irisov, again touching the visor of his cap and striking his heels together. "I am very glad, very glad, indeed, to meet you. Hey, Khatzkel, bring that leather case from the carriage. It is in front, under the seat. May I ask, doctor, if you are going far?"

"To Gusyatin. I've just been appointed there."

"Oh, yes! The infantry regiment? There are some pretty good fellows among the officers, though they drink like horses! It's a rather sorry little place, but something like a large city, when judged by our local standards. So that means that we shall meet occasionally? The pleasure will be mine, I am sure. . . . Just now . . . ha-ha! . . . you were a witness

of an exercise of paternal authority, so to speak, on my part."

"Yes. . . . Somewhat," said Kashintzev, forcing himself to smile.

"What can you do? What can you do? That's my way. I like to be stern. . . . You know, I hate all sorts of complaints and coercion, and that kind of nonsense. I've got my own way of dealing with these things."

The police official was a man of good presence, as ladies in a small town would call it—handsome, tall, with long side-whiskers like those of General Skobelev, and a high, white, tranquil forehead. His eyes were of a beautiful, blue color, but full of languor, that seemed unmanly, almost indecent, capricious. His whole face was of a gentle, even, porcelain-pinkish tint, and his bright-red lips moved and stretched coquettishly, like two red worms. Everything pointed to the fact that Irisov was the handsome man of the locality, the heart-eater—a former cavalry officer, perhaps, surely a card-player and reveller, capable of dispensing with sleep for three nights at a stretch and of never becoming intoxicated. He spoke rapidly and distinctly, making his face take on the expression of exaggerated attention when the other man spoke, but really listening only to himself.

"I am a father to them all, but a stern parent," continued the official, pointing up impressively with his index-finger. "Put the case on the table, Khatzkel; that's it. I am stern, it is true, and do not allow any one to walk over me, as others do, but I know by heart

every one of my . . . he-he-he . . . subjects, so to speak. You saw that peasant just now, didn't you? That's Trofim, a peasant from Oryekh, and his surname is the Tail. Do you think that I don't know that he is a horse-thief? I know it very well! Only just now, I say nothing, but one fine May morning—ding! . . . And Trofim the Tail will be suddenly taken out of circulation. Now look at this same Khatzkel. Just a plain, ordinary, rotten little Jew, isn't he? Yet I know every little thing he does, the rascal. What? Don't I speak the truth, Khatzkel?"

"My good Lord, as though your Honor could speak anything but the truth!" came from Khatzkel, in a tone of servile reproach. "All of us, poor, unfortunate Jews pray to God all the time for our great commissary. And we say among ourselves: 'What do we need parents for, when our dear, beloved commissary is kinder to us than our own fathers could be?'"

"Did you hear that?" asked the commissary carelessly, pointing his thumb over his shoulder at Khatzkel and screwing up his eyes significantly. "The voice of the people! But don't worry, I hold them right here. What? Don't I speak the truth?"

"What shall I say to that?" Khatzkel seemed all shrunk together, as he almost squatted down, extending his hands before him, as though pushing away some monstrous, unjust accusation. "Why, before we have time to think of something, his Honor the commissary already knows it all."

"Did you hear that?" asked Irisov briefly. "'Won't you?' said Sabakevich," said he, pointing to the open

chest. "Will you have some roasted duck? It's a fine duck, prepared at home! And here are some pancakes with fish and onions. There is some rum. Have no doubts about that, it is real Jamaica rum, and even smells of bedbugs. . . . And this—now please don't make fun of me—this is chocolate. Fit for the ladies only, so to speak. But let me recommend it to you; it's the most nourishing thing on a journey. I've had occasion to learn this through bitter experience, so to speak, because of my thankless occupation. Please. . . ."

Kashintzev refused the refreshments politely, but the commissary was insistent. He was finally compelled to drink a glass of rum, which smelled of anything but rum. Kashintzev felt sad and ill at ease. From time to time he threw a stealthy glance at Etlya, who was discussing something with her husband in an animated tone, behind the counter. Her fantastic fascination had already left her. Something pitiful, downtrodden, dreadful in its every-day modernity was now seen in her face, though it still remained just as touchingly beautiful as before.

"Oh, yes! I see where you're aiming!" the commissary suddenly said mischievously, chewing his meat, his moist, soft lips moving succulently. "A pretty little Jewess, eh?"

"Unusually pretty! Beautiful!" exclaimed Kashintzev involuntarily.

"Y-yes. . . . Good stuff. But! . . ." The commissary spread his hands, heaved an artificial sigh, and closed his eyes for a second. "But you cannot do

anything. We have already tried it. There is no physical possibility. Can't do it. Your eyes see it, but. . . . But wait, I am going to ask now. Hey, Khatzkel, *Kimmér*. . . ."

"For God's sake, please don't do it!" Kashintzev made a gesture of entreaty with his hand as he rose from his bench. "Please don't!"

"Oh, nonsense. . . . Khatzkel!"

But at that moment the door opened, and the driver on duty entered the room with the whip in his hands and his three-cornered cap on his head.

"Which of the gentlemen ordered horses to Gusyatin?" asked he. But, noticing the police commissary, he hastily pulled off his cap and roared a military salute.

"Hello, Yurko," answered Irisov condescendingly. "Too bad you cannot stay a little," said he to the physician with regret. "It's so rare that one has a chance of conversing with an educated man."

"You must excuse me, I am in a hurry," Kashintzev said, hastily buttoning up his coat. "You know yourself what duty is. What is my bill?"

He settled for his meal, and shuddering at the thought of the cold, dark night and of the tiresome journey before him, went toward the door. He still preserved the childish, naïve habit of telling fortunes by trifling signs and, his hand already on the door-knob, thought: "If she looks at me, then it will take place." But what was going to take place he himself did not know, just as he did not know the name for that feeling of boredom, weariness, and undefinable disappointment which was oppressing him. But the woman did not

turn around. She stood there, with her marvellous antique profile turned toward him, her face illumined brightly by the lamp, and was busily arranging something on the counter, with her eyes lowered.

"Good-by," said Kashintzev, opening the door.

Thick clouds of steam rushed in from the street, concealed the beautiful face, and struck the physician with a sensation of cold. The post-horses stood at the steps, their heads sadly lowered.

They went past the village, crossed the frozen river, and then again the long, melancholy road, with dead, white fields to the right and to the left stretched before them. Kashintzev dozed off. And immediately the same strange and deceiving sounds spoke and sang in front of the sleigh and behind it and to either side. A pack of dogs barking long and shrilly, a human crowd stamped heavily, childish laughter jingled, the little bells lisped rapidly, as though they were mad, yet saying distinctly: "The first thing is sternness, sternness!"

And this sounded like the commissary's voice.

Kashintzev's elbow struck against the side of the sleigh and he awoke.

On the sides of the road tall, dark trunks of pine-trees ran toward him, their branches weighted down with heavy snow, arching over the roadway like immense white paws. Among them, far ahead, one seemed to see tall, thin, stately columns, fences, balconies, high white walls with black Gothic windows, the fantastic outlines of a sleeping, bewitched palace. But the road made a turn, and the phantom palace

disappeared, turning into dark rows of trees, with an overhanging canopy of snow-covered branches.

"Where am I? Where am I going?" Kashintzev asked himself with perplexity and fright. "What was it that had just happened to me? It was something big, and joyful, and important."

In his memory there rose, with amazing clearness, the beautiful face of that woman, its tender contours of cheeks and chin, its moist, calmly passionate eyes, the fascinating curve of her flower-like lips. . . . And suddenly his whole life, that which was already past and that which still lay ahead of him, presented itself to him just as lonely and sad as this dark road at night, with its boredom, cold, emptiness, and desolation, with its irritating illusions.

By a mere chance, the impelling beauty of a strange, unknown woman had shed its rays into his soul and warmed it, filled it with happiness, with wonderful thoughts and pleasant anxiety; but this bit of his life had already gone past, disappeared behind him, and nothing remained of it but a recollection, just like that of a disappearing light of a casual station. And there is no other light ahead; the horses are running at an even pace, and the indifferent driver—Time—dozes indifferently on his seat.

ANATHEMA

"FATHER DEACON, stop burning that candle. You won't get far at this rate," said the archdeacon's wife. "It's time to get up."

This little, thin, sallow-faced woman treated her husband very sternly. When she was still at school, the prevalent opinion there was that all men are rascals, cheats, and tyrants. But the deacon was not a tyrant at all. He was really afraid of his hysterical wife, who was subject to fits. They had no children, as the wife was barren. The archdeacon was of immense stature, weighing over three hundred pounds, with a chest that reminded one of the body of an automobile. He was possessed of a powerful voice and, at the same time, of that gentle condescension, which is so peculiar to exceedingly strong men when they are dealing with very weak persons.

It took the archdeacon a long time to get his voice into proper shape. He had to go through the whole of that painfully long and unpleasant process which is so familiar to all public singers. He, too, had to make local application with cocaine, and with caustic, and gargle his throat with a solution of boric acid. While still in bed, Father Olympy began to try out his voice:

"Via . . . hmm! . . . Via-a-a! . . . Halleluja, halleluja . . . maa-ma . . ."

"Don't seem to sound well, God bless me. Hm, . . ." thought he to himself.

Just like famous singers, he never trusted his own powers. It is a well-known fact that actors become pale and make the sign of the cross just before coming out. Father Olympy was the same way. And yet, there was not another man in the city, perhaps not in all Russia, who could make the dark, ancient church, with its gilt mosaics, resound to his low notes. He alone could fill every nook and corner of the old building with his mighty voice, and make the cut-glass ornaments on the incense-bowls tinkle in unison.

His wife brought him a glass of weak tea with lemon and, as usual on Sundays, a small glass of vodka. Olympy tested his voice again. "Mi, mi, fa. . . ."

"Strike that *D*, mother," said he.

His wife struck a prolonged, melancholy note.

"Hm . . . Pharaoh, driving his chariot. . . . No; doesn't work. The devil take that writer, what's his name?"

Father Olympy was a great lover of books. He read them one after another, in any order, never interesting himself much in the writer's name. His education in the seminary, based mostly on learning things "by heart," and consisting almost exclusively of memorizing church canons and quotations from the Fathers of the Church, had developed his memory wonderfully. In order to memorize a whole page of the complicated works of such dialecticians as Augustine, Tertullian, Origen, and Basil the Great, all he had to do was to read the lines, and they would become firmly fixed in

his memory. Books for reading were supplied by his friend Smirnov, a student at the Academy. The book he had just read was a beautiful story of life in the Caucasus, where soldiers, Cossacks, and Chechens killed each other, drank wine, married, and hunted wild beasts.

The book aroused the archdeacon's adventurous soul. He read it over three times, and during each reading he cried and laughed with joy, doubled his fists, and turned his huge body from side to side. Of course, it would have been much better if he were a hunter, a fisherman, a horseman; certainly, his place was not in the clergy.

He always came to the church a little later than was necessary; just like the famous barytone at the opera. Approaching the southern gate of the altar, he tested his voice for the last time.

"Hm, hm. . . . Sounds like *D*, and that rascal of a regent will be sure to strike *C-sharp*. But I don't care. I'll get the choir to sing my tone, anyway."

The pride of the popular favorite awoke in him. He knew that the whole city adored him, and that even boys in the streets gathered in crowds to gaze at him, as they did upon the gaping mouth of the enormous trumpet in the military orchestra that played in the public square.

The archbishop came in and was solemnly led to his place. His mitre was tilted a little to the left. Two subdeacons were standing on each side, swaying the censers rhythmically. The clergy, in bright holiday

vestments, surrounded the archbishop's seat. Two clergymen brought the images of the Saviour and the Virgin Mary from the altar.

The church was an old one, and, like Catholic churches, it had a little elevated platform in one corner, with a carved-oak railing around it, and a flight of narrow, winding steps leading up to it.

Slowly, feeling each step and carefully supporting himself by the hand-rail, as he was always afraid to break something through his awkwardness, the archdeacon mounted the platform, coughed, spit over the railing, touched his tuning-fork, went from *C* to *D*, and began the service.

"Bless me, your most gracious Eminence!"

"Oh, no, Mr. Regent. You won't dare to change the pitch as long as the bishop is here," he thought. He felt with pleasure at that moment that his voice sounded better than ever, went easily from note to note, and made the air of the whole church tremble with its soft, deep sighs.

It was Quadragesima Sunday, in the first week of Lent. At first there was very little work for Father Olympy. The reader monotonously mumbled the psalms; the deacon, an academician and future professor of homiletics, spoke rapidly through his nose.

From time to time the archdeacon roared, "*We shall attend,*" or, "*We shall pray to the Lord.*" His huge body, in a surplice embroidered with gold, towered over the crowd. He stood there shaking his black, silvering hair, that was like a lion's mane, and testing

his voice from time to time. The church was filled with old women and gray-bearded little old men who reminded one of fish-traders, or money-lenders.

"It's funny," thought Olympy, "that all women's profiles remind you either of a fish or of a hen's head! . . . There's my wife, too. . . ."

But his professional habits compelled him to follow closely the service, which was in accordance with the seventeenth-century mass-book. Finally, the psalm-reader finished his part, concluding it with the words: "The Most High Lord, our Master and Creator, Amen."

Then began the rite of the affirmation of Orthodoxy.

"Who is more supreme than our Lord? Thou, O Lord, art supreme above all, thou, alone, performest miracles."

The melody was slow, and not very distinct. The service for Quadragesima Sunday and the rite of anathematization may be varied at will. For example, the Holy Church knows anathemas written for special occasions, *e. g.*, anathemas against Ivashka Mazepa, Stenka Razin, the heretic Arius, the iconoclasts, the Archpriest Habakkuk, etc., etc.

But something peculiar happened to the archdeacon that morning, something that had never happened before. Perhaps it was the whiskey that his wife gave him with his tea.

Somehow his thoughts could not become detached from the story he had read the night before. Simple, beautiful, fascinating pictures rose in his mind with unusual clearness and distinctness. But, through sheer

force of habit, he completed this part of the service, pronounced the word "Amen," and concluded:

"This apostolic faith, this paternal faith, this Orthodox faith, this universal faith, affirm."

The archbishop was an extreme formalist and pedant. He never permitted any omission in the canons of the most blessed Father Andrew of Crete, or the funeral rites, or any other service. And Father Olympy, making the whole church tremble with his mighty voice, and the glass ornaments on the lustres tinkle in unison with it, cursed, anathematized, and excommunicated the following: all iconoclasts, all heretics, beginning with Arius, all followers of the teachings of Italus, the pseudo-monk Nile, Constantine and Irinika, Varlaam and Akindina, Herontius and Isaac Argira, all Mohammedans, Jews, those who mock the Holy Church, those who blaspheme the Day of Annunciation, tavern-keepers who rob widows and orphans, Old Believers, the traitors and rebels Gregory Otrepiev, Timoshka Akundinov, Stenka Razin, Ivashka Mazepa, Emelka Pugachev, and also all who profess faith contrary to the Holy Orthodox faith.

Then followed categorical anathemas against those who refuse the blessing of redemption, who deny the holy sacraments, who do not recognize the councils of the Fathers of the Church and their traditions.

"All those who dare to presume that the Orthodox rulers are not seated on their thrones by the special grace of God, and that at their anointing and their elevation to that high station the blessings of the Holy Ghost do not descend upon them, and who dare,

therefore, to rise in rebellion against them and to betray them. . . . All those who blaspheme and mock the holy images. . . ."

And after each exclamation the choir answered him sadly, the gentle, angelic voices groaning the word, "*Anathema.*"

Hysterics began among the women.

The archdeacon had already finished the "Long Life!" service to all the deceased zealots of the church, when the psalm-reader mounted the platform and handed him a short note from the archpriest, in which he was instructed, by the order of the archbishop, to anathematize the "boyard Leo Tolstoy."—"See Chapt. L. of the mass-book," was added in the note.

The archdeacon's throat was already tired after its long exertions. Yet he cleared it again and began: "Bless me, your most gracious Eminence." He scarcely heard the low whisper of the old archbishop:

"May our Lord God bless you, O archdeacon, to anathematize the blasphemer and the apostate from the faith of Christ, rejecting its holy sacraments, the boyard Leo Tolstoy. In the name of Father, and Son, and the Holy Ghost."

"Amen," came from the choir.

Suddenly, Father Olympy felt his hair standing erect on his head, becoming hard and heavy, like steel wire. And at the same moment the beautiful words of the story he had read the night before came to him, clear and distinct:

". . . *awaking, Eroshka raised his head and began to watch intently the night-butterflies, which were flying*

around the trembling flame of the candle, and falling into it.

"'*You fool,' said he. 'Where are you flying? Fool, fool!' And, sitting up, he began to chase the butterflies away from the flame with his thick fingers.*

"'*Why, you'll get burned, you little fools. Fly over there, there's lots of room,' he was saying gently, catching butterflies by the wings, holding them carefully in his thick fingers, and then letting them go.*

"'*You're hurting yourself, and I'm trying to save you.*'

"My God! Whom am I anathematizing?" thought the archdeacon in terror. "Him? Is it possible? Didn't I weep all night in joy, and rapture, and admiration?"

But, obedient to the traditions of centuries, he continued to hurl those awful, stupefying words of anathema and excommunication, which fell into the crowd like the peals of a huge brass bell.

". . . The former priest Nikita, and the monks Sergius, Sabbatius, Dorothius, and Gabriel . . . blaspheme the holy sacraments of the church, and will not repent and accept the true church; may they be cursed for such impious doings. . . ."

He waited a few moments. His face was now red, streaming with perspiration. The arteries of his neck swelled until they were as thick as a finger. . . .

"*Once I was sitting by the river and saw a cradle floating down. A perfectly good cradle it was, only one side broken off a little. And then all sorts of thoughts came into my head. Whose cradle is it? Those devils of soldiers of yours must have come to the village, taken the*

women with them, and some one of them, maybe, killed the child. Just swung him by the feet and dashed him against the corner of the house. As though such things were not done! There is no soul in men! And such thoughts came to me, such thoughts. . . . They must have taken the woman with them, I thought, thrown the cradle away, burned the house. And the man, I guess, took his gun and went over to our side to be a robber.

". . . And though he tempt the Holy Spirit, like Simon the Magician, or like Ananias and Saphira, returning like a dog to the matter he has vomited, may his days be short and hard, may his prayer lead to sin, may the devil dwell in his mouth, may he be condemned forever, may his line perish in one generation, may the memory of his name be effaced from the earth. And may double, and triple, and numerous curses and anathemas fall upon him. May he be struck with Cain's trembling, Giezius's leprosy, Judas's strangulation, Simon's destruction, Arius's bursting, the sudden end of Ananias and Saphira. . . . Be he excommunicated and anathematized, and forgiven not even unto death, may his body fall to dust and the earth refuse to accept it, and may a part of it descend into eternal Gehenna, and be tortured there day and night. . . ."

And his vivid memory brought to his thought more and more of the beautiful words:

"*Everything that God has made is for man's joy. There is no sin in anything. . . . Take a beast, for example. He lives in the Tartar rushes, and in ours. . . . Wherever he comes, there is his home. He eats whatever God gives him. And our people say that for such doings*

you will lick hot irons in Hell. Only, I think that it is not true."

Suddenly the archdeacon stopped and closed the ancient mass-book with a snap. The words that followed on its pages were even more terrible than those that he had spoken. They were words that could have been conceived only by the narrow minds of the monks who lived in the first centuries of our era.

The archdeacon's face became blue, almost black; his hands clutched convulsively the railing of his platform. For a second he thought that he was going to faint. But he recovered himself. Straining the utmost resources of his mighty voice, he began solemnly:

"To the joy of our earth, to the ornament and the flower of our life, to the true comilitant and servant of Christ, to the boyard Leo. . . ."

He became silent for a second. There was not a whisper, not a cough, not a sound in the crowded church. It was that awful moment of silence when a large crowd is mute, obedient to one will, seized by one feeling. And now, the archdeacon's eyes reddened and became suffused with tears, his face suddenly became radiant with that beauty which can transform the face of a man when in the ecstasy of inspiration. He coughed again, and suddenly, filling the whole edifice with his terrible voice, roared:

"Lo-o-ong li-i-ife."

And, instead of lowering his candle, as is done in the rite of anathematization, he raised it high above his head.

It was in vain that the regent hissed at his choir-

boys, struck them on the heads with his tuning-fork, closed their mouths with his hand. Joyfully, like the silvery sounds of the archangels' trumpets, their voices rang out through the church: "Long life! Long life!"

In the meantime, Father Prior, Father Provost, an official of the Consistory, the psalm-reader, and the archdeacon's wife had mounted on the platform.

"Let me alone. . . . Let me alone . . ." said Father Olympy in a wrathful, hissing whisper, contemptuously brushing aside Father Provost. "I've spoiled my voice, but it was for the glory of the Lord. Go away."

He took off the surplice embroidered with gold, reverently kissed the stole, made the sign of the cross, and came down. He went out through the aisle, towering over the crowd, immense, majestic, and sad, and people involuntarily moved away, experiencing strange fear. As if made of stone, he walked past the archbishop's place without even glancing at it.

It was only in the churchyard that his wife caught up with him. Crying and pulling him by the sleeve, she began to shriek:

"What have you done, you crazy idiot? Got drunk in the morning, and started up. . . . It'll be lucky if they only send you to some monastery to clean cesspools. How much trouble I'm going to have now, and all on account of you, you blockhead!"

"Doesn't make any difference," said the archdeacon, looking at the ground. "I'll go as a common laborer, become a switchman or a janitor, but I won't

serve in the church any more. I'll go to-morrow. Don't want it any more. My soul can't stand it. I believe truly, according to the symbol of the faith, yes, I believe in Christ and the Apostolic Church. Yet I feel no wrath."

And then again, the familiar, beautiful words rushed through his mind:

"*Everything that God has made is for man's joy.*"

"Idiot! Blockhead!" shrieked his wife. "I'll send you to the insane asylum. . . . I'll go to the governor, to the Tsar. . . . Got drunk out of his senses, the blockhead."

Then Father Olympy paused, turned around, and, opening wide his large, angry eyes, said sternly and heavily:

"Well?"

For the first time his wife became timidly silent. She turned away from her husband, covered her face with a handkerchief, and burst into tears.

And he walked on, immense, dark, and majestic, like a monument.

THE LÆSTRYGONIANS

I

Silence

At the end of October, or the beginning of November, the city of Balaklava, that most original corner of the variegated Russian Empire, begins to live a life all its own. The days are still warm and pleasant, as they sometimes are in the fall, but at night it grows cold and the ground resounds under your step. The last summer visitors have gone to Sebastopol with their bundles, suitcases, trunks, sickly children, and *decadente* young ladies. As mementos of the recent guests, there still remain grape-skins which the invalid summer visitors had scattered in abundant quantities on every pier and in every narrow street, all for the purpose of aiding their precious health, and piles of paper, refuse, cigarette stumps, scraps of letters and newspapers, which always remain behind when the summer visitors go away.

And immediately Balaklava becomes roomy, fresh, comfortable, and cosey, as though it were an apartment which had just been left by a crowd of noisy, smoking, arguing, uninvited guests. The old, native Greek population, which had until then concealed itself

in back rooms and shacks, now creeps forth and takes possession of the streets.

On the street running along the shore fishing-nets are spread out, stretched across the whole width of the street. Against the rough cobbles of the street they seem thin and delicate as a cobweb, and the fishermen, creeping over them on all fours, appear like black spiders mending their broken, airy traps. Other fishermen are twisting the cord that they will use for catching the sturgeon and the flounder; with a serious and preoccupied air, they run back and forth with the cord thrown over their shoulders, twisting the thread without stopping.

The captains of the fishing-boats are sharpening the sturgeon-hooks, the old, dull copper hooks which, according to an old tradition of fishermen, are always preferred by the fish to the modern steel hooks of the English style. On the other side of the bay the boats, drawn on the shore and turned with the keel up, are being calked, tarred, and painted.

Around the stone fountains, where a thin stream of water runs and murmurs without stopping, the thin, dark-faced Greek women, with large eyes and long noses—so strangely and touchingly like the representations of the Holy Virgin on the old Byzantine images—chatter for hours at a time about their petty household affairs.

And all this is done without any undue haste, in a pleasant, neighborly way, with skill and deftness acquired by age-long habits, beneath the bright and pleasant autumn sun, on the shore of the merry

blue bay, under the clear autumn sky, which rests so calmly upon the indented line of the low, bald mountains that surround the bay.

It seems that the summer guests have already been forgotten, as though they had never been there. Two or three rainy days, and the last vestige of their recent presence will be washed away from the streets. The whole senseless summer, passed in absurd haste, with its evening concerts, its dust raised by the women's skirts, its pitiful flirtations and discussions of political subjects, now seems like a far-away, long-forgotten dream. The whole interest of the fishing town is concentrated upon the fish and their coming.

In the coffee-houses of Ivan Yuryich and Ivan Adamovich, the fishermen form into companies for their future work, while others play dominos. Captains are chosen here, too. The conversation in every corner of the room is concerned with the one subject of shares, fishing-nets, hooks, the possible catch, the mackerel, the flounder, the sturgeon, and other fish caught here. And at nine o'clock the whole town is plunged into profound slumber.

Nowhere in the whole of Russia, and I have travelled much through its width and length—nowhere have I experienced the sensation of such deep, complete, and perfect silence as in Balaklava.

Sometimes I would go out on the balcony and feel immediately swallowed up by the darkness and the silence. The sky is black, the water in the bay is black, the mountains are black. The water is so thick, so heavy, and so calm that the stars reflected in it do

not twinkle or break. Not a single human sound interrupts this silence. Now and then, perhaps once a minute, you can hear a tiny wavelet splash upon a rock. But this lonely, melodious sound only deepens, only accentuates the silence. You can hear the blood coursing through the veins in your ears. A rope holding a boat squeaks somewhere. And again everything is silent. You feel that the night and the silence are plunged in one black embrace.

I gaze to the left, where the narrow neck of the bay hemmed in by two mountains, disappears. A long, low mountain lies there, crowned by some ancient ruins. If you look at it attentively it will appear to you like a gigantic monster of the fairy-tale who lies with his breast on the shore of the bay and, thrusting his dark head with its upstanding ears deep into the water, greedily drinks it, unable to satiate his thirst.

At the very spot where the monster ought to have an eye burns a little red speck that represents the light of the custom-house. I know this light well, for I have passed it a hundred times, touching the lantern with my hand. But in the strange silence and the deep blackness of this autumn night I seem to see more and more distinctly the back and the head of the ancient monster, and I feel that its sly and wicked eye is watching me intently with a feeling of concealed hatred.

Suddenly I recall that verse from Homer in which Odysseus sees blood-thirsty Læstrygonians in a small, narrow-necked Black Sea bay. I also think of the

enterprising, supple, handsome Genoese who erected their colossal fortifications upon the brow of this mountain. And in my mind rises the picture of a stormy winter night when a whole English squadron, headed by the haughty flagship, the *Black Prince*, was dashed to bits against the bosom of the old monster. The *Black Prince* is now lying on the bottom of the sea, not far away from the spot where I am standing, with its bars of gold still within its hold, that had carried down with it hundreds of human lives.

The old monster in its half-slumber gazes at me with its sharp little red eye. It appears to me like an old, old, forgotten divinity, which dreams its thousand-year-old dreams amidst this black silence. And I feel a strange disquiet.

The slow, lazy footsteps of the night-watchman are heard at a distance, and I distinguish clearly not only every sound of his heavy, iron-shod fisherman's boots beating against the stones of the sidewalk, but also the shuffling of his heels at every second step. The sounds are so distinct amidst this silence that it seems to me as though I were walking together with him, although I am certain that he is more than a verst away from me. But now he has turned aside into some dark alley, or, perhaps, has sat down on a bench somewhere: his footsteps are heard no more. Everything is silent. Everything is dark.

II

The Mackerel

The autumn is coming fast. The water becomes colder and colder. Just now one can catch only small fish with drag-nets, those large vases of netting which are thrown to the bottom from the boat. But suddenly a rumor is set afloat that Yura Paratino had rigged his boat and had sent it to the spot where his mackerel-nets were placed, between the Capes of Aya and Laspi.

Of course, Yura Paratino is not the Emperor of Germany, or a famous bass, or a fashionable writer, or a singer of gypsy songs, but when I think of the importance and respect that attach to his name along the whole shore of the Black Sea, I always recall his friendship with pleasure and pride.

Yura Paratino is a tall, strong Greek of about forty, with an appearance of having been steeped in brine and tar. He has a bull-neck, a dark complexion, black, curly hair, mustaches, a clean-shaven, square chin, with an indentation in the middle that reminds one of animals—a chin that bespeaks enormous will-power and great cruelty—and thin lips that indicate great energy, all the more so because the corners of his mouth are turned downward. There isn't a single fisherman on the whole shore more skilful, clever, powerful, and courageous than Yura Paratino. No one could outdo Yura when it came to drinking, and yet he had never been seen drunk. No one had ever

been as successful as Yura, not even the famous Theodore of Oleiza himself.

In him, more than in any one else, was developed that special fisherman's indifference to the unjust strokes of fate, an indifference which is so highly prized by these seafaring people.

When Yura would be told that the storm had torn to pieces the rigging of his boat, or that one of his boats filled to the top with precious fish had sunk in the storm, Yura would only say lightly, "Oh, let it go to the devil!" And immediately he would seem to have forgotten all about it.

The other fishermen say about Yura: "The mackerel have only begun coming here from Kerch, but Yura already knows where to put his nets."

These nets are about seventy feet long and thirty-five feet wide. The details of their weaving and placing are hardly interesting. But when large schools of fish swimming along the shore at night are caught in what becomes a trap, because of the nets' special inclination, the fish cannot get away without being thrown out of the net. The fishermen lift the net out of the water and empty the fish into their boats. It is highly important to note in time the moment when the water about the net begins to seethe as though it were boiling. If this moment is not anticipated, the fish are likely to break through the net and escape.

And now, when some mysterious premonition had informed Yura of the fish's intentions, the whole of Balaklava was passing through disquieting, annoy-

ingly tense days. Boys were stationed on the tops of the mountains to watch day and night, and the boats were kept in constant readiness. Numbers of fish-dealers had come from Sebastopol. The local canning factory was busily preparing its barns for enormous quantities of fish.

At last, early in the morning, the rumor flashed like lightning through the houses, the restaurants, and the streets.

"The fish have come! The fish have come! Mackerel are being caught in the nets of Ivan Yegorovich, Kota, Khristo, Spiro, Capitanaki, and, of course, of Yura Paratino."

All the boats are now manned and go out of the harbor.

And the rest of the inhabitants of the town are on the shore. They are all there, the old men, the women, the children, the two fat saloon-keepers, the gray-haired coffee-house keeper, Ivan Adamovich; the proprietor of the drug-store, who is a very busy man and has come out but for a moment, the good-natured assistant surgeon, Yevsey Markovich, and the two local physicians.

The most important circumstance is the fact that the first boat to enter the bay sells its fish at a higher price than the others, and so the feelings that agitate the crowd gathered on the shore spring from interest and sport and ambition and calculation.

Finally, at the spot where the neck of the bay narrows down between the two mountains, appears the first boat, making a sharp curve around the shore.

"It's Yura."

"No, it's Kolya."

"No; of course, it is Genali."

The fishermen have an ambition peculiar to themselves. When the catch is particularly large they consider it a mark of special elegance fairly to fly into the bay instead of entering it slowly. And the three men at the oars, straining their back and arm muscles to the utmost, their necks bent forward, their bodies almost falling back at each of their frequent and measured strokes, send the boat flying across the smooth surface of the bay with short, rapid strokes. The captain, his face turned toward them, is standing up, guiding the direction of the boat.

Of course, it is Yura Paratino! The boat is brimful of white, silvery fish, and the feet of the oarsmen are above them, tramping them down. Carelessly, while the boat is still in motion and the oarsmen have scarcely begun to slow down the motion of the boat, Yura jumps upon the wooden pier.

The bargaining with the fish-dealers immediately begins.

"Thirty!" says Yura and slaps, with the palm of his hand, the long, bony hand of one of the fish-dealers.

This means that he wants to sell his fish at thirty roubles a thousand.

"Fifteen!" shouts the Greek and, in his turn, having liberated his hand, slaps Yura's palm.

"Twenty-eight!"

"Eighteen!"

Slap, slap. . . .

"Twenty-six!"

"Twenty!"

"Twenty-five!" says Yura hoarsely. "There's another of my boats coming along."

And at that moment another boat appears through the neck of the bay, followed by a second, a third, then two together. They make every effort to overtake one another, as the price of fish is falling and falling. In another half-hour the fish will be worth no more than fifteen roubles a thousand; in an hour, ten roubles, and finally five, and even three.

Toward evening the whole of Balaklava is permeated with the odor of fish. Mackerel is fried or canned in every house. The wide mouths of bread-ovens are full of tile boards on which the fish are being fried in their own juice. This is considered the most delicious food by the local lovers of fish. And all the coffee-houses and saloons are filled with smoke and the odor of fried fish.

Yura Paratino, the most open-handed man in all Balaklava, goes into the coffee-house where the Balaklava fishermen are gathered surrounded by its heavy clouds of tobacco and fish smoke; he shouts to the proprietor in a tone of command, his voice rising above the uproar:

"A cup of coffee for everybody!"

A moment of universal silence, amazement, and joy sets in.

"With sugar or without?" asks the proprietor of the coffee-house, the immense and dark Ivan Yuryich.

Yura hesitates for a second: a cup of unsweetened

coffee costs three copecks; with sugar it costs five. But Yura is far from being mean-spirited. The most unskilled laborer of his boat had earned no less than ten roubles that day.

He says contemptuously:

"With sugar. And let's have some music, too!"

The musicians appear immediately: a man with a clarinet and one with a tambourine. Late into the night they play their monotonous, mournful Tartar melodies. Young wine appears on the table—the pinkish wine that smells of fresh grapes and causes intoxication in a very short while, leaving you with a dreadful headache on the following morning.

And on the pier, also until late at night, the last boats are being unloaded. Bending down in the boat, two or three Greeks quickly and with easy skill take two fish in the right hand and three in the left and throw them in the basket, keeping an exact, rapid, and ceaseless count. And on the following day more boats come in from the sea.

It seems that the whole of Balaklava is full of fish. The lazy cats, with their bellies swollen through overeating, are lying there on the sidewalks, and when you hit them with your foot, they open one eye lazily and then doze off again. The geese, also seeming half asleep, can be seen on the placid surface of the bay, and from their beaks stick the tails of some of the fish they had eaten.

For many days the air is full of the strong odor of fresh fish and the burning smell of fried fish. And the light, sticky fish-scales cover the wooden piers,

the stones of the street, the hands and the clothes of the happy housewives, and the blue waters of the bay, lazily rippling under the autumn sun.

III

Poaching

It is evening. We are sitting in Ivan Yuryich's coffee-house, that is lighted by two hanging lamps. Thick clouds of tobacco smoke hang in the air. All the tables are occupied. Some of us play cards or dominos, others sip their coffee, others again simply lounge about, revelling in the light and warmth and exchanging remarks. A long, lazy, cosey, pleasant evening ennui has taken hold of the entire coffee-house.

By and by we begin a rather odd game which is a great favorite with the fishermen here. I must confess, in spite of the protests of my modesty, that the honor of having invented the game belongs to none but myself. In this game each of the participants in turn is blindfolded with a handkerchief tied with a sailor's knot, and then a jacket is thrown over his head; two other participants take him by each arm, lead him all over the room, make him spin about several times, then take him outside, bring him in again and steer him in and out among the tables trying their best to confuse him as to his position. When, by general acclaim, enough has been done to confuse the victim, he is permitted to stop and is asked to point to the north.

Every one is given three chances, and the one who shows the poorest sense of orientation has to treat the company to coffee or to young wine, each person present receiving a cup or a half-bottle. I must admit that I am the most frequent loser. As for Yura Paratino, he invariably points north with the accuracy of a magnetic needle. What a beast!

Suddenly I turn back involuntarily and note that Khristo Ambarzaki winks at me to approach him.

He is not alone; by his side sits Yani, my teacher and the head of our fishing crew.

I go over to them. Khristo, for appearance sake, asks for a set of dominos, and while we pretend to be playing he whispers to me, purposely rattling the dominos:

"Take your *difans* and come quietly to the landing-place together with Yani. The bay is chock-full of mullets, like a jar of olives. The swine drove them in."

Difans are very thin fishing-nets, some one hundred and fifty yards long and about three yards wide. They consist of three walls, of which the two outer ones have larger meshes and the middle has narrow ones. The small mackerel will pass through the large-meshed walls, but will get entangled in the meshes of the inner net; on the other hand, large mullets which knock their heads against the middle net and turn back become entangled in the large outer meshes. I am the only man in Balaklava who owns such nets.

Quickly, and trying to keep in the shadows, Yani and I take the nets to the beach. The night is so

dark that we are hardly able to descry Khristo, who is already waiting for us in a boat. Muffled sniffing, grunting, and heavy groans are heard from the bay. It is the dolphins, or sea-swine, as the fishermen call them. They have driven enormous shoals of fish into the narrow bay and are now darting across it, devouring the fish as they pass.

What we are getting ready to do is undoubtedly a crime. According to a peculiar ancient custom it is permitted to catch fish in the bay only with fishing-rods and trammels. Only once a year, and for no more than three days, are fish caught in municipal nets. This unwritten law is a sort of fisherman's taboo.

But the night is so black, the groans and the grunting of the dolphins goad so violently the hunter's curiosity in us, that, repressing an involuntary sigh of repentance, I cautiously leap into the boat, and, while Khristo rows noiselessly, I help Yani to get the nets in shape. He pays out the lower edge of the net laden with large leaden plummets, while I hand him quickly the upper edge, along which cork-floats are strung.

But suddenly a wonderful spectacle, which I had never seen before, fascinates me. Near by, to the left of the boat, sounds the snorting of the dolphin, and all of a sudden I notice a great number of sinuous silvery streamlets, resembling the rays of bursting fireworks, dashing around the boat with incredible speed. It is the frightened fish fleeing before the rapacious dolphin. And here I notice that the entire sea is ablaze with fire. Pale-blue jewels shimmer on

the tops of small, scarcely rippling wavelets. Where the oars touch the water, deep, gleaming bands flame up in magic splendor. I dip my hand into the sea, and when I draw it out a handful of shimmering diamonds drips into the water, and for a long time delicate, bluish phosphoric lights glow on my fingers. This is one of those magic nights when, as the fishermen say, "the sea is ablaze."

Another shoal of fish darts under the boat, furrowing the deep with short, silvery arrows. I hear the snorting of the dolphin near at hand. Here he is, at last! He appears alongside the boat, disappears for a second under the keel and immediately forges ahead. He swims deep under the water, but with extraordinary clearness I distinguish his powerful body, strained in the race. Wrapped in the shimmer of infusoria, his contours set off by myriads of spangles, he looks like a shining glass skeleton, darting at a terrific speed.

Khristo rows with absolute noiselessness, and Yani only once hits the side of the boat with the lead plummets. We have unwound the entire net, and now we can start.

We cross to the opposite shore. Yani plants himself firmly on the prow, his feet wide apart. A large, flat stone, tied to a rope, quietly slides from his hands and sinks to the bottom, hardly splashing the water. A big cork buoy rises to the surface, a scarcely visible black dot on the surface of the bay. Now we make our boat trace a half-circle, as far as the length of our net allows, then we come again to the shore and

lower another buoy. We are inside a closed half-circle.

If, instead of poaching, we had been working openly and freely, the next thing to do would have been to make as much noise as possible with our oars and otherwise, so as to drive the fish within our half-circle, into the nets, where they would become entangled in the meshes. But our business needs secrecy, so that all we can do is to go twice from buoy to buoy, noiselessly churning the water with our oars and making it boil in beautiful pale-blue knolls. Then we return to the first buoy. Yani cautiously lifts up the stone which served us as an anchor and drops it without the slightest noise to the bottom of the boat. Standing on the prow and leaning on his left foot, which is put forward, he draws out the net, rhythmically raising and lowering his hands in turn. Slightly leaning overboard, I see the net emerging from the water, and I distinguish clearly every mesh of it, every thread, like an enchanting fiery web. Little, flickering lights slide down Yani's fingers, and fall back into the water.

And I hear the fish, large and alive, fall to the bottom of the boat with a heavy, wet thud, writhe vigorously, and strike the boards with their tails. Gradually we come to the second buoy and cautiously raise it out of the water.

It is now my turn to row. Khristo and Yani again examine the nets and pick out the mullets from the meshes. Khristo cannot refrain from throwing a big, fat, silvery mullet to my feet over Yani's head.

"Some fish!" he whispers in my ear, chuckling with bliss.

Yani quietly stops him.

When their work is done and the wet net again lies on the prow platform of the long boat, I see that the entire bottom is carpeted with fish, which are still alive and writhing. But we must make haste. We describe a few more circles, although prudence bids us return to town. Finally, we land in a spot which is but little frequented. Yani brings a basket, and armfuls of big, plump fish, which spread a fresh, delightful odor, fall into it with a savory smack.

Ten minutes later we come back to the coffee-house, one after another. Every one invents some pretext for his absence. But our trousers and jackets are wet, Yani has fish-scales in his mustache and beard, and we all smell of the sea and wet fish. Khristo, who cannot control the excitement he has just been through, now and then throws in an allusion to our adventure.

"I was just on the beach. . . . Lots of swine in the bay—it's simply terrible!" And he would dart a sly, mischievous glance at us.

Yani, who, with Khristo, had carried and hid the basket, sits near me and mumbles into his cup of coffee in a scarcely audible whisper:

"About two thousand, all big. I brought some thirty over to your place."

This is my share of the booty. I nod. But now I am somewhat ashamed of my crime. Still there

is comfort in catching quick, knowing glances around us. It seems that we were not the only ones poaching that night.

IV

White Sturgeon

Winter is setting in. One evening it began to snow, and during the night everything had become white, the embankment, the boats on the beach, the roofs, the trees. Only the water of the bay remains black and sombre, and splashes restlessly in this calm white frame.

All along the shores of Crimea—at Anapa, Sudak, Kerch, Theodosia, Yalta, Balaklava, and Sebastopol—the fishermen prepare for the white-sturgeon season. They clean the fishing-boots, enormous horse-leather boots reaching to the thigh, each weighing some twenty pounds; they repair their water-proof coats painted with yellow oil-paint, and their leather trousers; they mend sails and knit seines.

Long before the beginning of the white-sturgeon season the devout fisherman Fyodor, from Oleiz, burns wax tapers and lamps filled with the finest olive-oil before the image of St. Nicholas, the miracle-worker of Myra in Lycia and the patron saint of seamen. When he will put out to sea with his crew of Tartars, the image of the sea saint will be taken from his shanty and nailed to the prow, as a guide and loadstar of luck. This is known to all the seamen of Crimea, because Fyodor does it every year

and because he has the reputation of a brave and lucky fisherman.

At last, with a fair wind blowing, in the early dawn that is still a part of the dark night, hundreds of fishing-craft leave the Crimean peninsula and set sail for the open sea.

How glorious is the moment of departure! All five men sit on the prow of the long boat. "God speed! God's help with you! God speed!"

The loosened sail falls, and, after flapping hesitatingly in the air for some moments, suddenly swells like a sharp, convex, upturned white wing. The boat, careening all the way to one side, gracefully moves out of the mouth of the bay into the open sea. The water sizzles and foams around the prow and the spray dashes into the boat, while one of the fishermen carelessly sits on the very gunwale, the lower hem of his jacket now and then skimming the surface of the water, and with a swaggering air lights a rolled cigarette. Beneath the grate of the prow is kept a small stock of provisions, consisting of strong whiskey, bread, smoked fish, and a barrel of water.

They sail away a distance of some thirty miles from shore. During this long journey, the leader of the crew and his assistant prepare the fishing implements. These consist of a strong rope about a mile long with bits of cord, about two yards long, tied to it at intervals of two or three yards. The pieces of cord are provided with hooks baited with small fish, and the whole thing is sunk to the bottom of the sea by means of two stones which are placed

on the ends of the rope and which serve as anchors. Their position is indicated by two cork buoys floating above the anchors on the surface of the sea, and surmounted by small red flags.

The assistant baits the hooks with extraordinary dexterity and rapidity, while the leader carefully coils the rope into a round basket, arranging it in a neat spiral close to the side of the basket. The bait is put inside the circle. The work, done almost in absolute darkness, is not so easy as would appear at first glance. When the time comes for lowering the rope into the water, one carelessly adjusted hook may catch the main cable and hopelessly entangle the entire outfit.

At dawn the place is reached. Each *ataman* (head of a fishing-gang) has his favorite, "lucky" spots, and he finds them in the open, tens of miles off the coast, as easily as we find a box of steel pens on our desk. The only thing to do is to sail east until the Foros lighthouse is sighted, taking care that the polar star should be visible above the belfry of the monastery of St. George. Every *ataman* has his secret signs in the form of lighthouses, large rocks, houses, solitary pines on the mountains, or stars.

When the place is selected, the first stone is lowered, soundings are made, and a buoy tied to the anchor. Then the fishermen row the entire length of the rope while the leader pays it out from the basket with a fabulous speed. When the entire rope is in the sea, the second stone is lowered, the buoy adjusted, and the work is done. The fishermen row

or sail back to shore, as the wind permits. A day or two later they return to their places and drag out the rope. If Providence wills or chance permits, the hooks with the bait will be swallowed by the sturgeon, and the fishermen will have a rich catch of this big, sharp-nosed fish, which normally weigh from 300 to 700 pounds, and in rare instances even as much as half a ton.

It was thus that, one night, Vanya Andrutzaki put out to sea in his long boat. To tell the truth, no one expected any good to come of his enterprise. Old Andrutzaki had died the preceding spring, and Vanya was much too young as yet. According to the opinion of experienced fishermen he should have served for two years more as a mere oarsman, and then worked another year as an assistant. But instead, he gathered a gang of green youngsters of the devil-may-care sort, rudely scolded his old mother who had begun to weep, abused the grumbling old fishermen with the profanest oaths, and had sailed off, he and his whole crew dead-drunk. His sheep-fur cap was rowdily tilted to the back of his head, and his curly hair, as black as a poodle's, fell in disorder over his sunburnt forehead as he stood on the prow of his boat.

A stormy gale was blowing on the sea that night, and a thick snow fell. Several fishing-craft came back soon after leaving the bay, for Greek fishermen, in spite of their long experience, are exceedingly prudent, not to say cowardly. "Bad weather," they said in explanation.

But Vanya Andrutzaki returned about noon, his

long boat chock-full of the largest white sturgeon. In addition, he towed in a monstrous fish, a sturgeon weighing about 750 pounds, which the crew had to thump with mallets and oars for a long time before they could put it to death.

This monster had given the crew no little trouble. Fishermen say that, as a rule, it is enough to bring the sturgeon's head to the level of the stern-board, and it will leap into the boat of its own accord. It is true that sometimes, while leaping into the boat, the sturgeon, with a powerful stroke of its tail, sends the careless fishermen flying into the sea. Besides, in catching sturgeon there are even more serious moments which threaten fishermen with real danger. That is exactly what had happened to Vanya Andrutzaki.

Standing on the very prow, which now rose to the foamy crest of broad waves and now sank into smooth, green water-pits, Vanya hauled in the rope with a rhythmical motion of his arms and back. Five small sturgeons, which had been taken off at the very beginning, lay motionless on the bottom of the boat. Then the catch became poorer: some hundred and fifty hooks were empty, with their bait untouched.

The men rowed in silence, with their eyes fixed on the two points of the beach indicated by their *ataman*. His assistant sat at his feet, taking the bait off the hooks and putting the rope into the basket in a neat bale. Suddenly one of the fish on the bottom of the boat began to writhe and shake.

"When a fish kicks, another is coming," said the

young fisher Pavel, repeating an old fishermen's saying.

That very moment Vanya Andrutzaki felt, deep in the sea, an enormous living weight shaking and resisting and straining on the rope, which became taut like a string. Leaning over the side, he noticed under the water the long, silvery, floating, shimmering body of a monstrous white sturgeon, and, unable to restrain his feelings, he turned to the crew and whispered, his eyes shining with excitement:

"A large one! Like a bull! More than a thousand pounds, I guess. . . ."

That was just what he should not have done! God forbid that you anticipate events or express joy over your success while at sea! And the ancient, mysterious belief immediately proved true in the case of Vanya Andrutzaki. He saw clearly the fish's long, sharp, bony head half a yard below the surface of the sea, and, stilling his wildly beating heart, he was getting ready to bring it to the board, when suddenly . . . the monster tossed up its tail above the wave and dashed into the depth of the sea, dragging along the rope with the bait-hooks.

Vanya did not lose his head. "Back astern!" he cried to the fishermen, swore savagely and elaborately, and started to pay out the rope after the disappearing fish. The hooks seemed to flash in the air from under his hands and whipped the water. The assistant helped him by throwing the rope out of the basket, and the oarsmen worked furiously, trying to overtake the monster. The work required extraor-

dinary speed and perfect accuracy. A few hooks became entangled in the assistant's hands. He shouted to Vanya to stop feeding the rope and started to set free the hooks with that speed and care which seamen alone manifest in moments of danger. In those few seconds the rope in Vanya's hands became as taut as a string, and the boat leaped on the waves in fury, towed by the frantic fish and driven by the efforts of the oarsmen.

"Pay away!" finally cried out the assistant. The rope started again sliding at an incredible speed from the *ataman's* dexterous hands, when suddenly the boat jerked and Vanya swore with a repressed groan: a copper hook pierced his palm, just below the little finger and stuck there its full length. . . . It is here that Vanya showed himself a real salt-water fisherman. Having wound the rope around the fingers of the wounded hand, he stopped feeding it for a second, and, producing a knife with his other hand, he cut the cord to which the hook was attached. The hook stuck fast in the palm, but Vanya tore it out with the flesh and threw it into the sea. And although both his hands and the rope were stained with his blood, although the boards of the boat and the water inside grew red, he did his work to the end and was the first to deal the obstinate monster a heavy blow with a mallet.

His was the first sturgeon catch of the season. The crew sold the fish at a very high price so that each member's share amounted to no less than forty roubles. On this occasion a good bit of wine was drunk, and toward evening the entire crew of *St. George the Con-*

queror—as Vanya's long boat was called—set out with music for Sebastopol in a two-horse curricle. There the gallant Balaklava fishermen, together with some navy sailors, smashed the piano, the bedsteads, the chairs, and the windows in a house of ill fame; then they thrashed one another thoroughly and came back only at dawn, drunk, bruised, but singing. And as soon as they left the cab, they got into the boat, set sail, and put out to sea again.

From that day Vanya's reputation as a real salt-water *ataman* was firmly established.

V

The Lord's Fish

(an apocryphal tale)

This charming ancient legend was related to me at Balaklava by the *ataman*, Kolya Konstandi, a real salt-water Greek, an excellent seaman, and a heavy drinker.

At that time he was instructing me in all those wise and strange things which make up the fishermen's lore. He showed me how to make sea knots and mend torn nets, how to bait hooks for white sturgeon, how to launch and clean seines, how to take out the mullet from the three-walled net, how to fry it, how to separate with a knife the *petalide* which grow on rocks, how to eat shrimps raw, how to forecast the night's weather by the day's surf, how to set sail, weigh anchor, and sound the depths of the sea.

He patiently explained to me the different directions and peculiarities of the winds: the levanter, the sirocco, the tramontane, the terrible *bora*, the propitious sea-wind, and the capricious land breeze.

To him I also owe my knowledge of fishermen's customs and superstitions. It is not permissible, during the catch, to whistle aboard the craft or to spit except overboard; one should never mention the devil, though one is permitted to curse by faith, the grave, the coffin, the soul, one's forefathers, their eyes, livers, spleen, and so on; it is well to leave in the net, as if by chance, a little fish: this brings luck, and God forbid that any article of food be thrown overboard while the boat is at sea. But the most terrible, unpardonable and objectionable breach of fishermen's etiquette, is to ask a fisherman: "Where are you bound for?" For a question like this one is likely to be roundly thrashed.

It is from him that I learned about the poisonous fish *drakus*, that resembles a small mackerel, and about the manner in which it ought to be taken off the hook; also about the sea-gremille which causes sores by stinging with its fin, and the terrible double tail of the electric ray. He also told me how skilfully a sea-crab eats an oyster by first putting a pebble into its valve.

And many a strange and mysterious sea-tale did I hear from Kolya in those sweet, quiet hours of the night in early autumn, when our yawl rocked gently on the sea, far away from the unseen shores, and when the two or three of us, sitting by the yellow

light of a hand-lantern, leisurely sipped the local pink wine, that smelled of freshly crushed grapes.

"There lives in the ocean a sea-serpent a *verst* long. Very seldom, not more than once in ten years, he comes up to the surface and breathes. He lives all alone. In former times there were many of them, males and females, but they did so much evil to the small fish, that God condemned them to sterility, and now only this thousand-year-old male serpent lives his last in loneliness. Seamen meet him occasionally, here and there, all over the world, in all the oceans."

"There lives, somewheres in the sea, on a deserted island, in a deep, submerged cave, the king of sea-lobsters. When he strikes claw against claw, there arises a great turmoil on the surface of the water."

"Fish converse among themselves—this is known to every fisherman. They warn each other about various dangers and traps, and an inexperienced, awkward fisherman can spoil a lucky spot if he lets some fish out of the net."

From Kolya I heard also about the Flying Dutchman, that eternal sea-wanderer, with black sails and a lifeless crew. This tale is known and believed all over the seashores of Europe.

But one old legend, told by him, especially touched me with its fresh and naïve simplicity.

Once at dawn, when the sun had not yet risen but the sky was already orange-colored and a pink mist hovered over the sea, Kolya and I were hauling out

a net which had been placed along the shore in the evening for mackerel. The catch was very poor. It consisted of about a hundred mackerels, five or six gremilles, a few dozen fat, golden crucians, and a lot of jelly-like mother-of-pearl-colored medusas, that resembled huge, colorless, many-legged mushroom pileuses.

But we also caught a very queer fish which I had never seen before. It had a flat, oval shape and would scarcely cover a woman's palm. Its edges were fringed with frequent, small, transparent hairs. Its head was small, and in it were set eyes that were not like those of a fish; they were black, rimmed with gold, and unusually lively. Its body was of an even, golden color. But most striking in this fish were two spots, one in the middle of each side. They were as large as a dime, but of an irregular shape and of a bright azure hue so remarkable that it is not found on any painter's palette.

"Look," said Kolya. "This is the Lord's fish. It seldom gets into our nets."

We placed it first into the boat pail, and later on, when we returned home, I poured some sea water into a big, enamelled basin, and put the Lord's fish in it. The fish immediately began to swim round and round, along the sides of the basin, almost touching them, and all the time in one direction. When touched, it emitted a short, scarcely audible, rattling sound, and increased its speed. Its black eyes rolled around, and the wavering of the countless hairs set the water in swift, wave-like motion. I wanted to keep the

Lord's fish in order to take it later to the Aquarium of the Biological Station at Sebastopol, but Kolya said, waving his hand:

"It does not pay to bother. Anyway, it won't live long enough. That's the kind of fish it is. If you take it out of the sea even for a second, it won't live. It is the Lord's fish."

Toward evening it died. And at night, while sitting in the yawl, I thought of it, and said:

"Kolya, why is this fish the Lord's?"

"Well," answered Kolya with devout earnestness, "our old men here tell the story this way: When our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day after his burial, no one believed him. Many miracles wrought by him were witnessed while he was alive, but people could not believe this one and they were afraid.

"His disciples renounced him, his apostles denied him, the faithful women abandoned him. Then he comes to his mother. At that moment, she was standing at the fireplace, frying some fish, preparing dinner for herself and hers. Said the Lord to her: 'Greetings! Here I am, thy Son, risen from the dead, as it is written in the Scriptures. Peace be with thee.' But she shuddered and cried out in affright: 'If thou art truly my Son, work thou a miracle, so I may be convinced.'

"The Lord smiled at her lack of faith and said: 'I shall take this fish lying on the fire, and it will spring to life. Wouldst thou believe me then?'

"And barely did he touch the fish with his two

fingers and lifted it up in the air, when it began to tremble and sprang to life.

"Then our Lord's mother had faith in the miracle and joyfully worshipped her resurrected Son. And ever since then there remained on the fish the two spots of heavenly azure. These are the traces of our Lord's fingers."

That was how a plain, simple-minded fisherman related this naïve, ancient tale. A few days later I learned that the Lord's fish has also another name, that of the fish of Zeus. Who knows how far back into the womb of ages this apocryphal tale extends?

VI

Bora

O dear, simple men, stout hearts, naïve, primitive souls, strong bodies, swept by the salt-sea breezes, sinewy hands, sharp eyes, that have so often looked into the face of death, into its very pupils!

Bora has been blowing for three days. *Bora*—also called the northeaster—is a mysterious, fierce wind, born somewhere in the bald, peeled-off mountains near Novorossiysk, which swoops down upon the round bay and sets the entire Black Sea rolling heavily. Its violence is so great that it upsets loaded freight-cars on the railways, uproots telegraph-posts, shatters freshly laid brick walls, and throws down solitary pedestrians. In the middle of the past century several war-ships, caught by the northeaster, found refuge

against it in the Novorossiysk Bay: under full steam they strove against the wind, but could not advance an inch; then they cast double anchors, yet the gale tore them from the anchors, dragged them into the bay, and dashed them to splinters on the rocks near the shore.

This wind is terrible because of its unexpectedness: it is impossible to foresee it—it is the most capricious of winds on the most capricious of seas.

Old fishermen say that the safest way of getting away from it is to "slip away into the open sea." And there have been times when *bora* carried away some small bark or pale-blue Turkish felucca ornamented with silver stars, across the entire Black Sea, to the Anatolian coast, three hundred and fifty *versts* away.

Bora has been blowing for three days. It is the time of the new moon. The birth-throes of the moon are, as usual, painful. Experienced fishermen have given up all hope of setting out to sea, and have dragged their boats as far away from the shore as they could.

The desperate Fyodor from Oleiz alonè, who for many days had been burning candles before the image of St. Nicholas, the miracle-worker, decided to put to sea in order to gather in his sturgeon line. With his gang, consisting entirely of Tartars, he set out three times, and each time, cursing and blaspheming, making no more than one-tenth of a sea knot an hour, he was forced to row back. Each time, in a fury which only a seaman can understand, he tore off the image of his saint nailed to the prow, hurled it to the bottom

of the boat, trampled it under foot, and cursed fiercely, while the crew with their hats and hands baled out the water which dashed madly over the sides of the boats.

Meanwhile, the old, sly Balaklava Læstrygonians sat in the coffee-houses, rolled cigarettes, sipped strong thick coffee, played dominos, complained of the weather, and, revelling in the cosey warmth and in the light thrown by the hanging lamps, they recalled ancient, legendary tales inherited from fathers and grandfathers, of how, in such and such a year, the surf was so many hundred yards high and the spray reached to the very base of the half-ruined Genoese fortress.

In the meantime, a bark from Foros was lost at sea. It belonged to a band of eight flaxen-haired Ivans, who had come all the way from the interior of Russia to try their luck on the Black Sea. In the coffee-house no one worried about them or pitied them. People smacked their lips over their liquor, laughed, and contented themselves with saying contemptuously: "The fools! In such weather! Oh, well, they're only Russians." On a dark, roaring night, in the hour preceding the dawn, all those poor Ivans from Ilmen Lake or from the Volga went to the bottom, like stones, with their horse-leather boots reaching to the waist, with their leather jackets and yellow-painted water-proof cloaks.

It was altogether different when Vanya Andrutzaki, in spite of all the warnings and persuasions of the old men, put to sea just before the *bora* set in. The Lord alone knows why he did it, most probably

out of boyish bravado, goaded by his youthful impetuosity and ambition and also by wine. Perhaps some red-lipped, black-eyed Greek girl was gazing at him that moment.

He set sail—the gale even then was quite strong—and vanished from sight. The boat dashed out of the bay with the swiftness of a fine prize-horse; for five minutes the white sail flashed on the blue of the deep, and then it became impossible to distinguish it from the white froth that leaped from wave to wave.

Only three days later he returned home. . . .

Three days and three nights without food or sleep, in a tiny cockle-shell amidst a furious sea—with no coast in sight, no sail, no beckoning lighthouse, no steamer's smoke on the horizon! But once back from his journey, Vanya forgot all about it, as though nothing had happened to him, as though he had taken a ride in a mail-coach to Sebastopol and bought a box of cigarettes there.

There were, however, several details which I squeezed with great difficulty out of Vanya's memory. For instance, at the end of the second night Yura Lipiadi was overcome by some sort of hysteric fit: all of a sudden he broke out weeping and laughing, and would surely have jumped overboard had not Vanya hit him on the head with an oar. There was also a moment when the crew, frightened by the furious speed of the boat, wanted to lower the sails, and it must have cost Vanya tremendous effort to curb the will of these five men and subjugate them to his own in

the very face of death. I also learned that the oarsmen worked so furiously that blood gushed from under their finger-nails. But all this was related to me in fragments, reluctantly, incidentally. Yes, in those days of feverish, tense struggle with death, many things were said and done which the crew of the bark will never relate to any one, not for the whole world!

During those three days and three nights no one at Balaklava closed his eyes except fat Petalidi, the owner of the hotel "Paris." Young and old, women and children, roamed along the coast in anxiety, scaled the cliffs and climbed up the Genoese fortress which overshadows the city with its two ancient battlements. Telegrams were sent all over the world: to the commander of the Black Sea ports, the bishop of our diocese, the lighthouses, the life-saving stations, the minister of the navy, the minister of ways of communication, to Yalta, Sebastopol, Constantinople, and Odessa, to the Patriarch of Greece, the governor, and also, for no earthly reason at all, to the Russian consul at Damascus, who happened to be an acquaintance of a Greek aristocrat of Balaklava, a dealer in flour and cement.

The ancient, immemorial ties which weld man with man came again to life, the deep feeling of comradeship, so little noticeable amidst the petty calculations and the bustle of every-day life, and the voice of the forebears rang again in every heart, of the forebears who, thousands of years ago, long before the time of Ulysses, stood out together against *bora*, on days and nights like these.

No one slept. At night the fishermen built a huge fire on the mountain, and people roamed about the coast with lanterns, as they do at Easter. But no one laughed or sang, and the coffee-houses were empty.

What a delightful, unforgetable moment it was, when, in the morning, at about eight o'clock, Yura Paratino, who stood on the summit of a cliff above the White Stones, screwed up his eyes, bent forward, bored the distance with his sharp gaze, and suddenly shouted:

"They're coming!"

No one but Yura Paratino could have descried the boat on the blue-black sea, which was still rolling heavily and viciously, but was slowly calming down. But five, ten minutes later any boy could see clearly that *St. George the Conqueror* was making for the bay, tacking about and running under sail. A great joy welded together hundreds of human beings into one body and one soul!

Before entering the bay they lowered their sails and took to oars; their entry was at top speed, as triumphant as though they returned after an excellent catch of sturgeon. All around people wept with joy: mothers, wives, brides, sisters, little brothers. Do you think that even one of the crew softened, burst into tears, or wept on some one's bosom? Not at all! Soaked, hoarse, and wind-swept, the six of them made straight for Yura's coffee-house, ordered wine and music, and for hours shouted songs and danced like madmen, leaving pools of salt water on the floor. Late at night their comrades carried them,

drunk and exhausted, to their homes; there every one of them slept twenty hours at a stretch. And when they awoke, their journey appeared to them like a trip to Sebastopol, where they had had a good time, and then returned home.

VII

The Divers

I

Probably since the Crimean War no steamer, except perhaps an occasional torpedo-boat on manœuvres, has entered the narrow-mouthed, sinuous, and oblong Balaklava Bay. And really what business could bring steamers to this out-of-the-way fishing settlement, half village, half town? Its only cargo, fish, is bought up on the spot by middlemen and is carted to the markets of Sebastopol, thirteen *versts* away. It is also from Sebastopol that a few people come to spend the summer months at Balaklava, using for that purpose the mail-coach, which charges them fifty copecks for the trip. The small but desperately brave steam-tug, *The Hero*, which plies daily between Yalta and Alupka, panting like a fagged-out dog, and tossing and pitching in the slightest breeze as if caught in a hurricane, tried to establish passenger communication with Balaklava. But this attempt, repeated three or four times, resulted merely in a waste of time and coal. *The Hero* came and left empty. And the Balaklava Greeks, the distant descendants

of the bloodthirsty Homeric Læstrygonians, standing on the landing-place with their hands in their pockets, greeted it and saw it off with cutting words, ambiguous advice, and stinging Godspeeds.

But during the siege of Sebastopol the charming pale-blue Balaklava Bay sheltered almost a quarter of the allied fleet. That heroic epoch has left some authentic traces at Balaklava, such as the steep road, which was cut by the English sappers in the ravine of Kefalo-Vrisi; the Italian cemetery, hidden among the vineyards on the top of the Balaklava hills, and the short plaster-of-Paris and bone pipes, which the allied soldiers smoked half a century ago, and which are unearthed from time to time by vineyard tillers.

But the legend blossoms forth more gorgeously. The Balaklava Greeks are even now convinced that it was only owing to the sturdy resistance of their own Balaklava battalion that Sebastopol was able to hold out so long. Yes, in former days Balaklava was inhabited by iron-hearted and proud men. Popular tradition has handed down the years a story which well illustrates their pride.

I do not know whether the late Emperor Nicholas I. ever visited Balaklava. It stands to reason that during the Crimean War he had not the time to come to Balaklava. But the local annals relate, with a great deal of assurance, that during a military muster the terrible Emperor, having ridden up close to the Balaklava battalion, was struck by their martial air, fiery eyes, and huge black mustaches. In a thundering and joyous voice he shouted:

"Good morning, men!"

But the battalion kept silent.

The Tsar repeated his greeting several times, rapidly working up into a rage. Not a sound from the soldiers! Finally, quite beside himself, the Emperor dashed up to the officer who was in charge of the battalion, and exclaimed in his fearful voice:

"Why, the devil take them, don't they answer? Haven't I said in plain Russian: 'Good morning, men!' "

"There are no *men* here," answered the officer meekly. "They are all captains."

Then Nicholas, so the story goes, laughed—what else could he do?—and shouted again:

"Good morning, captains!"

And the gallant Læstrygonians gayly responded:

"*Kále méra* (Good day), your Majesty!"

Whether or not the event happened as related, or whether it took place at all, is hard to say in default of conclusive historical evidence. But up to this day a goodly portion of the brave Balaklavians bear the family name of Capitanaki, and if you ever run across a Greek with the name of Capitanaki, you may be sure that either he or his near ancestors come from Balaklava.

But the brightest and most dazzling flowers of imagination decorate the tale of the English squadron which sank off the coast of Balaklava. On a dark winter night several English ships were making for Balaklava Bay, seeking refuge from a storm. Among them was a magnificent three-mast frigate, *The Black*

Prince, laden with money wherewith to pay the allied armies. Sixty million roubles in English gold were on board. Old men even know the precise amount.

The same old men say that nowadays there blow no longer such hurricanes as the one that raged on that terrible night. Monstrous waves, breaking upon the vertical cliffs, tossed up to the very foot of the Genoese tower—fifty yards up!—and washed its old gray walls. The fleet could not locate the narrow mouth of the bay, or probably, having found it, the men-of-war were not able to enter the inlet. All the ships were smashed on the cliffs, and together with the magnificent *Black Prince* and the English gold went down by the White Stones, which up to this very day emerge threateningly from the sea, where the narrow mouth of the bay broadens out seaward, toward the right, as you leave Balaklava.

Nowadays steamers pass far away from the bay, fifteen to twenty *versts* off. From the Genoese fortress it is almost impossible to descry the dark, seemingly stationary body of the steamer, its long, trailing tail of gray, melting smoke, and its two masts gracefully bent backward. But the sharp eye of a fisherman almost unfailingly distinguishes these vessels by signs which are incomprehensible to both our sight and experience: Here is a freighter from Eupatoria. . . . And here a "Russian Company" steamer. . . . This is a "Russian" one . . . and there is one of Koshkin's boats. . . . And here is the *Pushkin,* tossing on the ripples—this one rocks even on a quiet sea.

II

One day, quite unexpectedly, a huge, old-fashioned, unusually dirty Italian steamer, the *Genova*, entered the bay. It happened late in the evening, during that part of autumn when all the summer visitors have left for the north, but the sea is still so warm that real fishing has not yet begun, and the fishermen mend their nets in leisurely fashion and prepare hooks, play dominos in the coffee-houses, drink wine, and, in general, enjoy their temporary leisure.

The evening was quiet and dark, with big calm stars twinkling both in the sky and in the slumbering water of the bay. Along the embankment the lanterns began to gleam, forming a chain of yellow dots. The bright rectangles of the stores were disappearing. Light, black silhouettes were slowly moving along the streets and sidewalks. . . . And then, I do not know who, perhaps the boys who were playing at the Genoese tower, brought the news that a steamer had turned in from the sea and was heading for the bay.

In a few minutes the entire native male population was on the quay. It is well known that a Greek is always a Greek, and, therefore, is curious first of all. It is true that in the Balaklava Greeks one senses, in addition to later admixtures of Genoese blood, some mysterious, immemorial, probably Scythian strain—the blood of the aboriginal inhabitants of this nest of freebooters and fishermen. You will notice many tall, robust, and dignified figures; at times you run

across regular, noble features; there are many fair-headed and even blue-eyed specimens among them. The Balaklava Greeks are neither greedy nor obsequious; they carry themselves with dignity; at sea they are daring, but without silly bravado; they are good comrades and keep their word. Really, they are a separate, exclusive branch of the Hellenic race, which has preserved itself mainly because of the fact that for many generations their ancestors came to life, lived, and died in their tiny town, marriages taking place among neighbors only. But the Greek colonizers had left in the psychic organization of the present-day inhabitants of Balaklava their own most typical trait which distinguished them even in the time of Pericles—curiosity and eagerness for news.

Slowly, at first showing its tiny front light, the steamer turned the sharp bend and headed for the bay. In the thick, warm darkness of the night its outlines were invisible from a distance, but the lights high on the masts, the signal-lamps on the bridge, and a row of round lighted bull's-eyes along the rail allowed one to guess at its size and shape. In the sight of hundreds of boats and smacks, which stood along the quay, the steamer was moving toward the beach almost imperceptibly, with that careful and awkward cautiousness with which a huge and powerful man passes through a nursery room with frail toys scattered all around it.

The fishermen were making guesses. Many of them had sailed on traders and, more frequently, on men-of-war.

"What are you talking about? Don't I see? Of course, it is a freighter of the Russian Company."

"No, it isn't a Russian steamer."

"Something must have gone wrong with the engine, and she is turning in for repairs."

"Maybe it's a battleship?"

"Bosh!"

Only Kolya Konstandi, who had sailed a long time on a gunboat on the Black Sea and on the Mediterranean, guessed correctly, declaring it an Italian vessel. And he did so only when the steamer had come very near the beach, and it was possible to make out her faded, peeled-off boards, the dirty streams running from the hatches, and the motley crew on the deck.

The end of a rope shot from the steamer in a spiral, and, uncoiling like a snake in the air, it flew at the spectators' heads. To hurl the end from the steamer adroitly, and to catch it as skilfully, is, as everybody knows, the first requirement of sea *chic*. Young Apostolidi, without removing his cigarette from his mouth, caught the end of the rope with an air as if he were doing it for the hundredth time that day, and carelessly to all appearances, but firmly, he wound it around one of the two cast-iron cannon which, from time immemorial, have been standing on the embankment, dug upright in the ground.

A boat pulled off from the steamer. Three Italians leaped ashore and busied themselves with ropes. One of them wore a cloth biretta, the other, a cap with a straight quadrangular visor, the third had on a

nondescript knitted cap. They were all small, robust, alert, and wiry, like monkeys. Unceremoniously they shoved the crowd with their shoulders, babbled something in their rapid, musical, tender Genoese dialect, and exchanged remarks with the men on the steamer. And all the time their big, black eyes smiled kindly and pleasantly, and their white, young teeth flashed from their sunburnt faces.

"Bona sera. . . . Italiano. . . . Marinaro!" said Kolya approvingly.

"Oh! Bona sera, signore!" answered the Italians gayly in a chorus.

The anchor chain rumbled and screamed. Something inside the steamer began to gurgle and hiss. The lights went out in the lanterns. In half an hour the Italian sailors were sent ashore.

The Italians, short, swarthy, and young, proved to be sociable and gay fellows. Full of light, charming ease, they made overtures that evening to the fishermen in the beer-halls and rathskellers. But the local people met them dryly and with reserve. They wanted, probably, to show these strangers that the visit of a foreign vessel was no rarity to them, that such things happened daily, and that, therefore, there was no reason for undue excitement or joy. Was it the voice of their local patriotism that spoke in them?

And—oh! it was an unseemly trick that they played that evening on the good, gay, trusting Italians, when the latter pointed at bread, wine, cheese, and other objects and asked the Russian words for them, blandly showing their magnificent teeth. Such were

the words which the fishermen taught their guests, that later on, whenever the Genoese tried to make themselves understood in Russian in the stores or on the market-place, the salesmen roared with laughter and the women fled, covering up their faces in shame.

That same evening the rumor spread all over the town with the speed of an electric message (the Lord knows how) that the Italians had come for the express purpose of raising the sunken frigate *The Black Prince* with its cargo of gold, and that the work was going to last the entire winter.

III

No one at Balaklava believed in the success of this undertaking. In the first place, of course, a mysterious spell lay on the sea treasure. Hoary, white old men, all bent with age, said that attempts to get the English gold from the bottom had already been made: Englishmen and also some fabulous Americans had come, wasted heaps of money, and had left Balaklava with empty hands. What, indeed, could such people as Englishmen or Americans do if the legendary Balaklava heroes of yore had failed here? Naturally, in those days the weather, the catch, the long-boats, the sails, and the people were quite different from the small fry of to-day. In former days there lived the mythical Spiro. He was able to dive to any depth and stay under water a quarter of an hour. This very Spiro, holding between his feet a stone three pounds in weight, went down to the bottom, to a

depth of a hundred yards, where the remnants of the sunken squadron had found their grave. And Spiro saw everything: the ship, the gold, but he could not take anything . . . *it will not let you.*

"Sashka the Messenger ought to try," one of the listeners would remark slyly. "He is our best diver."

Everybody laughed, and loudest of all—displaying his beautiful, proud mouth—laughed Sashka Argiridi, *alias* Sashka the Messenger.

This worthy—a superb, blue-eyed man, with a hard classic profile—is the greatest lazybones, cheat, and buffoon on the entire Crimean seacoast. He was nicknamed "the Messenger" because sometimes, at the very height of the summer season, he would sew a pair of gold stripes on the band of his cap and would seat himself on a chair in the street very near to the hotel. And if some giddy tourists had the misfortune of addressing a question to the self-styled commissionaire, no earthly power could save them from becoming Sashka's victims. He would drag them over hills, through courtyards, vineyards, cemeteries, and regale them with all kinds of impossible stories. He would run into somebody's courtyard, break into pieces a fragment of an old pot, and then coax the tourists into buying the potsherds—the remnants, he would swear, of an ancient Greek vase dating to the time before Christ. At other times he would hold up in front of their noses an ordinary, thin, oval-shaped, and grooved pebble which the fishermen use as plummets for their nets, trying to persuade the poor tourists that no Greek fisherman

ever goes to sea without such a talisman, which is hallowed at the shrine of St. Nicholas, and which saves them from storms.

But his most remarkable trick is diving. While accompanying a boating party of simple-minded tourists whom he bores with the inevitable "Our sea is deserted," "Down Mother Volga," and similar songs, he would skilfully and imperceptibly turn the conversation to the sunken squadron, the mythical Spiro, and the subject of diving in general. A quarter of an hour under water—even to the credulous members of the boating party this sounded like a lie, like a specifically Greek lie. Two or three minutes, well, that may be possible. . . . But fifteen! Of course, Sashka is cut to the quick. . . . He frowns, offended. . . . Well, if people don't believe him, he will personally and on the spot, this very minute, prove that he, Sashka, will dive and stay under water all of ten minutes.

"It is true that the job is not an easy one," he says rather gloomily. "In the evening blood will come out of my ears and eyes. . . . But I will not let anybody say that Sashka Argiridi is a braggart."

The tourists try to make him listen to reason and to dissuade from such a reckless undertaking, but to no avail, since the man is insulted in his tenderest spot. Quickly and angrily he takes off his coat and trousers, in a twinkling strips off the rest of his clothes, making the ladies turn away and screen themselves with umbrellas, and then with a noise and a splash he throws himself into the water, head first, without

forgetting, however, to measure with his eye the distance between the boat and the near-by public baths for men.

Sashka is really an excellent swimmer and diver. Deep down in the water he turns about under the keel of the boat and heads straight for the baths. And while the holiday makers in the boat are greatly alarmed—reproach one another and, in general, make much and noisy ado—Sashka sits on one of the steps of the baths and hurriedly finishes smoking some one's cigarette end. He returns in the same manner, and quite unexpectedly bobs up out of the water—to everybody's relief and delight—close to the boat, trying his best to make his eyes bulge and his chest pant from the exertion.

Of course, all this hocus-pocus is for Sashka a source of income. But it must be recognized that what guides him in his tricks is not at all greed, but rather the imp of gay, boyish mischief that lives in him.

IV

The Italians did not conceal the purpose of their visit: they came to Balaklava with the express intention of exploring the scene of the naval disaster, and, if circumstances permitted, to raise from the bottom all of the more valuable remnants—mainly, of course, the legendary golden treasure. The expedition was headed by Giuseppe Restucci, an engineer and an inventor of a special diving apparatus. He was a middle-aged, tall, taciturn man, always

dressed in gray, with a gray, oblong face and almost white hair, with a cataract on one eye—in general, looking more like an Englishman than an Italian. He put up at the hotel on the beach, and of an evening, when you called on him, he treated you to Chianti and to the verses of his favorite poet, Steccheti:

"A woman's love is like coal, which burns when aglow, and soils when cold."

And although he recited the verses in Italian, with his soft and musical accent, their meaning was clear without translation, owing to his wonderfully expressive gestures: with such an air of sudden pain did he jerk away his hand, singed by the imaginary fire, and with such a mien of squeamish disgust did he spurn the cold coal!

There were also aboard the vessel a captain and two assistant officers. But the most remarkable member of the crew was, of course, the diver—*il palambaro*—a fine Genoese, by the name of Salvatore Trama.

Congested veins, like little, blue snakes, were seen on his big, round, dark-bronze face, studded with black dots which looked as if they were caused by a gunpowder burn. He was rather short, but because of the extraordinary volume of his chest, the breadth of his shoulders, and the massiveness of his powerful neck, he gave the impression of a very stout man. When he walked, with his lazy gait, along the embankment, his hands in his trousers pockets and his feet wide apart, he looked from afar like a walking square, his height not exceeding his breadth.

Salvatore Trama was an affable, indolently jovial, and trustful man, with a tendency toward apoplexy. He was not unwilling to relate strange, marvellous things about his professional experiences.

Once, in the Bay of Biscay, he went down to the bottom, fifty yards deep. Suddenly, amidst the greenish dusk of the deep, he noticed that a huge shadow was slowly moving from above straight toward him. Then the shadow halted. Through the round window of the diving-helmet Salvatore beheld right above his head, at the distance of about a yard, an enormous electric ray, about five yards in diameter, "as big as this room," as Trama said. It stood motionless, waving the edges of its round, flat body. One slight contact with the diver's body of its double tail, which carries a powerful electric charge, would mean death for brave Trama. Those two minutes of expectation, at the end of which the monster seemed to have changed its mind and slowly swam on, shaking its thin, waving sides, Trama considers the most horrible moments of his hard and dangerous life.

He spoke also of how he met under water dead sailors, who had been thrown overboard. In spite of the weight tied to their feet, and, owing to the decomposition of the body, they settle into a layer of water of such a density that they can neither sink nor rise. Standing upright, with the cannon-ball fastened to their feet, they travel in the water, carried by a gentle current.

Trama also related a mysterious accident which happened to another diver, his relative and teacher.

He was an old, robust, cold-blooded, and daring man, who had searched the sea bottom of nearly all the seacoasts of the globe. His exceptional and dangerous trade he loved with all his heart, as does every true diver.

Once, this man, while engaged in laying a telegraph-cable at the bottom of the sea, had to go down to a comparatively slight depth. But as soon as he reached the bottom and signalled the fact, he gave the signal of alarm: "Lift me up. Am in danger."

When he was hurriedly dragged out and freed from the brass helmet connected with the scaphander, every one was struck by the expression of terror which had distorted his pale face and whitened his eyes. They stripped the diver of his clothes, made him swallow a few gulps of cognac, and did all they could to soothe him. For a long time his jaws clattered, and he could not say a word. Finally he came to himself and said:

"Basta! I don't go down any more! I have seen. . . ."

Until his dying hour he told no one what sight or hallucination had shaken his mind so fearfully. If the conversation turned to that subject he became sulkily silent and left the company at once. . . . And he kept his word: never again did he go down to the bottom of the sea.

V

There were about fifteen sailors aboard the *Genova*. They all lived on the steamer and seldom went ashore. Their relations with the Balaklava fishermen remained distant and coldly polite. Only Kolya Konstandi greeted them good-naturedly from time to time:

"Bona giorna, signori. Vino rosso. . . ."

These gay young southern lads must have felt very lonesome at Balaklava after their visits to Rio Janeiro, Madagascar, Ireland, Africa, and many lively ports of the European Continent. At sea, constant danger and the straining of all one's forces; ashore, wine, women, singing, dancing, and a good fight—this is the life of a true seaman. But Balaklava is only a tiny, quiet place, a narrow, pale-blue inlet, lost amidst naked cliffs, with several dozen shanties perched on them. The wine here is sour and strong—as for women, there are none for the amusement of a gallant seaman. The Balaklava wives and daughters lead a reserved and chaste life. Their only diversion is a leisurely chat at the fountain, where housewives come to fill their jars with water. Men, even close friends or relatives, avoid calling on one another at home, preferring to meet in a coffee-house or on the landing.

Once, however, the fishermen rendered the Italians a small service. There was on the *Genova* a steam-launch with an old, very poor engine. Several sailors, under the command of the assistant captain, went out into the open sea in this launch. But, as often happens in the Black Sea, a strong gale began blow-

ing from the land and drove the frail craft into the open sea with increasing speed. For a long time the Italians refused to give up: for an hour they struggled with the wind and the waves, and it was nerve-racking to watch from the rocks the tiny cockle-shell, crowned with a tail of smoke; now it appeared on the crests of the waves, now it disappeared completely, as if foundering in the waves. The launch could not overcome the wind, and it was driven farther and farther out to sea. At last, those who watched the boat from the Genoese fortress noticed a white rag hoisted on the smoke-stack. In the language of signals it meant: "Am in danger." Two of the best Balaklava barks, *Russia's Glory* and *Svyetlana*, at once set sail and made seaward.

Two hours later they towed in the launch. The Italians were somewhat crestfallen, and poked fun at their own situation in a rather constrained manner. The fishermen, too, cracked jokes, but with an air of marked superiority.

Sometimes, while catching flat fish or white sturgeon, the fishermen happened to hook a sea-cat—a species of electric ray. With all necessary precaution, the fishermen would take it off and throw it overboard. But some one, probably that student of the Italian language, Kolya, spread a rumor that Italians consider the sea-cat one of the choicest of dainties. Frequently after that, a fisherman on his way back from the sea would shout as he passed the steamer:

"Italiano, signoro! Take this for your lunch!"

The round, flat electric ray would shoot through the air and fall on the deck with a heavy thud. The Italians laughed, showing their magnificent teeth, shook their heads good-naturedly, and mumbled something in their own tongue. They probably thought that the sea-cat is considered the finest local dainty and they did not wish to insult the good fishermen by rejecting their offering. . . .

VI

Two weeks after their arrival, the Italians built and launched a large raft, on which they placed a steam-engine, an air-pumping machinery. The long shaft of a crane, like a huge fishing-rod, rose slantingly over the raft. Once, on a Sunday, Salvatore Trama was lowered for the first time into the water of the bay. He wore the ordinary gray rubber suit of a diver, in which he appeared larger than usual, shoes with leaden soles, and iron shirt-front on his chest, and a round brass helmet which encased his head. He walked on the bottom of the bay for about half an hour, and his road was marked by a mass of air-bubbles which welled up to the surface. And a week later all Balaklava learned that on the following day the diver was to go down at the White Stones, to the depth of a hundred yards. And when on that morrow the small, miserable launch towed the raft to the mouth of the bay, almost all the fishermen's barks which were stationed in the bay were waiting at the White Stones.

The main advantage of Mr. Restucci's invention

was that it enabled a diver to reach a depth at which a man in an ordinary scaphander would be crushed by the tremendous pressure of the water. It was with surprise and, at any rate, with a feeling of deep respect that our fishermen watched the preparations which were being made before their eyes. First the steam crane lifted up and set down a strange case which resembled slightly the human figure deprived of its head and arms. It was made of a thick sheet of copper, on the outside covered with pale-blue enamel. Then this scaphander was opened like a gigantic cigar-case, in which, instead of a cigar, a human body was to be placed. Salvatore Trama, smoking a cigarette, calmly watched these preparations and lazily smiled, passing careless remarks from time to time. Then he flung the cigarette end overboard, waddled over to the case, and slid into it. Several mechanics busied themselves over him for a long time, setting up all sorts of apparatus, and it must be said that when the work was done, the diver presented quite a dreadful spectacle. Only his arms remained outside, the rest of his body being shut up in a solid pale-blue enamelled coffin of tremendous weight. A huge pale-blue ball, with three bull's-eyes—one in the front and two on the sides—and with an electric lantern in the forehead, hid his head; the main cable, a rubber pipe for air, a signalling rope, a telephone wire, and a light-conducting wire seemed to cover the apparatus with a net, increasing the air of oddity and dread which rested on this pale-blue massive mummy, provided with living human arms.

The steam-engine gave a signal, and the air resounded with the clatter of chains. The bizarre, pale-blue box separated itself from the deck of the raft and it sailed through the air calmly, twirling on its vertical axis, then started downward slowly. First it touched the surface of the water, then plunged down to its feet, its waist, its shoulders. . . . Presently the head, too, disappeared, and finally nothing was seen except the steel cable, slowly descending into the water. Silently and seriously the fishermen exchanged glances and shook their heads. . . .

Engineer Restucci is at the telephone. From time to time he flings short commands to the mechanic who regulates the movements of the rope. All around in the boats reigns complete, deep silence, interrupted only by the hissing of the air-pumping machine, the noise of pinions, the whizzing of the steel cable on the pulleys, and the abrupt words of the engineer. All eyes are fixed on the spot where the terrible ball-like head had disappeared.

The descent is painfully long. It lasts more than an hour. But finally Restucci becomes animated, speaks several times into the telephone receiver, and suddenly utters a short command:

"Stop! . . ."

Now all the spectators understand that the diver has reached the bottom, and every one heaves a sigh of relief. The most terrible part is over. . . .

Squeezed into his metallic case, with only his arms free, Trama was unable to move on the sea bottom. The only thing he could do was to order through the

telephone that he be transported forward together with the raft or moved to the side by means of the crane, lifted up, or lowered down. Without leaving the telephone, Restucci calmly and imperiously repeated his orders and it seemed as if the raft, the crane, and all the machines were set in motion by the will of an invisible, mysterious being under the water.

Twenty minutes later Salvatore Trama gave a signal that he be lifted up. Slowly, as before, he was dragged up to the surface, and when he was again suspended in the air, he gave the odd impression of a terrible and at the same time helpless animal, miraculously extracted from the deep.

At last the case stood on the deck. The sailors quickly and adroitly took off the helmet and unpacked the case. Trama emerged from it sweating, choking, his face almost black with blood congestion. He seemed to make an effort to smile, but the result was a grimace of suffering and weariness. The fishermen in their boats remained respectfully silent and shook their heads as a sign of amazement and, according to the Greek custom, clacked their tongues significantly.

An hour later all Balaklava knew what the diver had seen on the sea bottom, at the White Stones. Most of the ships were so thoroughly buried in mud and all sorts of dirt, that there was no hope of lifting them up. As for the three-mast frigate with gold, which had been sucked in by the sea bottom, the only part of it which was still visible was a bit of the

prow on which were the green copper letters:" . . . ck Pr. . . ."

Trama also told that around the sunken squadron he saw many boat anchors, and this news moved the fishermen, because each of them, at least once in his life, had to leave his anchor there, caught in the rocks and the fragments of the ill-fated fleet.

VII

The Balaklava fishermen, too, once succeeded in offering the Italians an extraordinary and, in a sense, magnificent spectacle. It was on the 6th of January, on the day of our Lord's baptism, which at Balaklava is celebrated in quite a peculiar manner.

By this time the Italian divers were completely convinced of the uselessness of further efforts to lift up the squadron. In a few days they were to sail home to their beloved gay Genoa, and they were hastily putting the steamer in order, scrubbing and washing the deck, and cleaning the engines.

The church procession, the clergy in gold-wrought vestures, the banners, the cross, and the saints' images, the church singing—all this attracted their attention and they stood on the deck, leaning over its railing.

The clergy ascended the boards of the landing-place. Behind them women, old men, and children were crowded together. As for the younger men, they sat in their boats, which formed a narrow semicircle around the landing-place.

The day was sunny, transparent, and cold. The

snow which had fallen the night before covered the streets, roofs, and the bald, brown hills; the water in the bay was an amethyst blue, and the azure of the heavens smiled festively.

The young fishermen wore underwear merely for the sake of decorum, and many of them were stripped to the waist. They all shivered with cold, and rubbed their frozen hands and chests. The singing of the chorus, harmonious and sweet, floated over the motionless stretch of the clear waters.

"On the river Jordan . . ." sang the priest in a thin falsetto, and the cross, raised high, sparkled in his hand. . . . The most critical moment had arrived. The fishermen stood each on the prow of his boat, all half-naked, bending forward in impatient expectation.

The priest again raised his voice and the chorus joined in harmoniously and joyfully: "On the river Jordan." At last, the cross rose for the third time above the crowd, and suddenly, sent flying by the priest's hand, it described a shining arc in the air and fell into the sea with a splash.

At the same moment dozens of strong, muscular bodies leaped from the boats into the sea, head first, shouting and splashing the water. Three, four seconds passed. The empty boats rocked and bowed; the churned-up water pitched and tossed. . . . Then one after the other, shaking, snorting heads, with hair falling over their eyes, began to appear above the water. The last one to emerge was young Yani Lipiadi. He held the cross in his hand.

The gay Italians could not remain serious at the sight of this extraordinary, half-sportlike, half-religious rite, hallowed by immemorial antiquity. They met the winner with such noisy applause that even the kindly priest shook his head disapprovingly:

"Very unseemly. . . . Very unseemly, indeed. . . . Is this a theatrical performance for them?"

The snow sparkled dazzlingly, the blue water caressed the eye, the sun flooded with its gold the bay, the hills, and the people, and the sea exhaled a strong, thick, and powerful odor. Fine!

AN INSULT

(An Actual Occurrence)

IT was five o'clock in the afternoon of an intolerably hot July day. The whole gigantic city, made of stone, was exhaling heat like a hot stove. The white walls of the houses glittered painfully. The asphalt sidewalks were soft and burned the soles. Even the acacia shade seemed hot as it fell on the sidewalk. The sea seemed dead as it lay heavy and motionless under the glaring sun. White dust was whirling through the streets.

In the foyer of a local theatre, a small group of lawyers who had undertaken to conduct *gratis* the cases of the people who suffered during the late Jewish massacre was finishing its session. There were nineteen of them, all young lawyers, conscientious, and men of modern ideas. The session did not require any formality, and most of them were dressed in flannels and suits of lustring. They were sitting by twos and threes at small marble tables, while the chairman sat behind the empty counter, at which candy was sold in the winter.

The heat streaming through the open window, together with the blinding sunlight and the noises of the street, wearied the lawyers almost to exhaustion. The whole atmosphere of the session seemed to be charged with indolence and irritability.

The tall young man with light mustaches and thin hair, who was acting as the chairman, was dreaming of how he would ride to his country house on his new bicycle, would undress quickly, and plunge into the clear, fragrant, cooling sea. At these thoughts his whole body quivered slightly. At the same time, he looked through the papers before him impatiently, and said in a drowsy tone:

"And so, gentlemen, Joseph Moritzovich is going to take charge of the Rubinchik case. Is there anything else in the order of the day?"

The youngest of the lawyers, a short, stout, dark, and lively Karaite, said in a low voice, but so that everybody heard him:

"The best thing in the order of the day is a glass of iced *kvass*."

The chairman glanced at him sternly, but could not hold back a smile. He sighed, and had already placed his elbows on the table, preparing to rise and declare the session closed, when the doorman stepped in and said:

"Your Honor, there are seven fellows outside asking to be let in."

The chairman glanced at his comrades impatiently.

"What do you say, gentlemen?"

Several replies came at once.

"Let them wait until the next meeting."

"Let them send in a written statement."

"Maybe it won't take long."

"Oh, let them go now."

"It's too hot for anything."

"Let them come in," said the chairman in an irritable tone, "and then please bring me a glass of *Narzan*. But see that it's cold, please."

The doorman opened the door.

"Come in. They will see you."

Then seven of the most unexpected and the most incredible personages filed into the foyer. The first of them was tall, had every appearance of self-confidence, and was dressed in a frock coat of the color of dry sea-sand, and a white shirt with pink stripes. A red rose was in the buttonhole of his coat. His head, when one looked at his face, appeared like a bean standing on end; looking at him from the side, it resembled a bean lying flat. His face was ornamented by curled-up mustaches and a fashionable little beard. He wore a pair of dark-blue spectacles and a pair of straw-colored gloves. In his left hand he held a black cane with a silver head, and in his right, a blue handkerchief. The other six men produced a strange, absurd, and variegated impression. It seemed as though they had interchanged not only clothes, but arms, legs, and heads as well. One of them was a man with the stately profile of a Roman senator, but was dressed in rags. Another wore a fine white waistcoat, beneath which was a dirty, Little-Russian shirt. Some of the faces were of the asymmetrical prisoner type, but they were full of unshaken self-confidence. And all these men, despite their apparent youth, evidently possessed great experience; far from being shy, they were aggressive and full of concealed, suspicious slyness.

The gentleman in the sand-colored frock coat bowed his head politely, and said in a tone of interrogation:

"Mr. Chairman?"

"Yes," answered the chairman. "What can I do for you?"

"All of us whom you see before you," said the man calmly, and, turning, he made a sweeping motion with his hand toward his comrades, "are the delegates of the United Rostov-Kharkov and Odessa-Nikolayev Organization of Thieves."

The lawyers moved about uneasily. The chairman sat back in his chair with his eyes wide open.

"The organization of whom?" asked he in perplexity.

"The organization of thieves," repeated the gentleman of the sand-colored frock coolly. "As for me personally, my comrades have done me the honor of choosing me as the representative of the delegation."

"We are very glad . . ." said the chairman.

"Thank you. The seven of us are ordinary thieves, specialists in different fields, of course. Our organization has empowered us to present to your dignified assembly," the gentleman again bowed graciously, "our most respectful appeal for help."

"Why, I do not exactly understand . . ." said the chairman in still greater perplexity. "But continue, please."

"The matter concerning which we have the honor and take the courage of applying to you, gentlemen, is very simple and clear. It will not take me more

than six or seven minutes to relate the circumstances to you, and I feel it my duty to warn you of this in view of the lateness of the hour and the fact that the Réaumur thermometer shows 37 in the shade." The orator coughed, and glanced at his watch. "Some of the local newspapers in their reports concerning the unfortunate and dreadful days of the late massacre, have recently begun to intimate that among the murderers hired by the police, those bands of drunkards, bums, cadets, and other similar persons recruited from the slums, were also thieves. At first we ignored this, but now we consider ourselves compelled to protest before society against this unjust and heavy accusation. I know very well that, from the point of view of law, we are criminals and enemies of society. But imagine for a moment, gentlemen, the situation of these enemies of society when they are accused of committing a crime which they did not commit and will never commit. Surely, there is no doubt that they will feel the insult of such an injustice much more acutely than the ordinary person. And so we declare that the accusation which has been brought against us is not only false, but illogical. And I hope to be able to prove it in a few words if this dignified assembly will consent to give me a hearing."

"Proceed," said the chairman.

"Please, please," was heard from several of the lawyers.

"I am sure, gentlemen, that both I and my comrades are sincerely grateful to you. Permit me to assure you that you will never regret your attention

to the representatives of our, perhaps shady, but at the same time unfortunate and difficult profession. And so, we begin, as sings Giraldoni in the prologue of 'Pagliacci.'

"Before I begin, may I ask, Mr. Chairman, for permission to quench my thirst? Here, boy, will you please bring me a glass of lemonade and a little English whiskey?—I shall not speak, gentlemen, of the moral side of our trade and of its social significance. You are acquainted better than I with that marvellous, brilliant paradox of Proudhon, 'Property is theft,' a paradox which has not as yet been overturned by all the prattle of cowardly middle-class people and fat priests. Let me illustrate what I mean. A man may be an energetic and clever robber and succeed in amassing a million of roubles, which he leaves to his rachitic, ignorant son, a degenerate idiot, a spineless worm, a true parasite. A million roubles is potentially a million working days, the right to the labor, the sweat, the blood, and the life of an enormous number of people. What for? Why? No one knows. And so, gentlemen, why not agree to the proposition that our profession is, to a certain extent, a corrective to the situation which permits too great a concentration of wealth in single hands, which is a protest against all abominations, arbitrary rules, violence, contempt for human personality, against all those abominations brought into being by the capitalist order of present-day society. Sooner or later, a social revolution must overturn this order of things. Property will then become a sad recollection of the past, and then, alas!

we, too, shall disappear from the face of the earth, we, *les braves chevaliers d'industrie.*"

The orator paused for a moment, took a tray from the hands of the doorman, and placed it on the table by his side.

"I beg your pardon. Here, boy, and when you go out please close the door after you."

"Yes, sir, your Excellency," shouted the doorman joyfully.

The orator drank half the glass, and then continued:

"Then let us set aside the philosophical, economic, and social phases of the question. Without any desire to tire you, I must, however, say that our profession is very near what is generally known as art, because it is made up of all the elements which go to make up art, viz.: inspiration, a calling, imagination, resourcefulness, ambition, and a long process of learning. From it, alas! is absent only virtue, concerning which our great Karamzin wrote with such brilliant and fiery enthusiasm.

"Gentlemen, I am far from the desire to play the buffoon before this dignified assembly, or to waste your precious time with aimless paradoxes. Yet I must needs prove, however briefly, the thought which I have stated. It may sound absurd and even amusing to hear of a thief's vocation. There are men who possess a remarkable visual memory, keenness and accuracy of eye, coolness, skill with their fingers, and a remarkably keen sense of touch. Such men must have been born into the world to be splendid sharpers. The pickpocket's trade requires of its devotees quick-

ness and accuracy, besides resourcefulness, powers of observation, and focussed attention. Some have a calling to be safe-blowers; from early childhood they are attracted irresistibly by the mysteries of all sorts of complicated mechanisms, bicycles, sewing-machines, mechanical toys, watches. Finally, gentlemen of the legal profession, there are men born with a feeling of hereditary enmity toward other men's property. You choose to call this phenomenon degeneration. Just as you like. But I say that a real thief, a thief by dint of natural instinct, cannot be tempted to change his profession for the honest existence; neither well-paid positions, nor abundance of money, nor a woman's love can win him. For here he has the charm of risk, the fascinating abyss of dangers, the rapid beating of the heart, the boisterous joy of life! You are armed with the arm of the law, with locks, revolvers, telephones, police, armies, while we have skill, craftiness, and courage for our protection. We are foxes, while society is a chicken-coop, guarded by dogs. Do you know that in our villages the most artistic and talented of men become horse-thieves and poachers? What can they do if life is so poor, so faulty, so unbearable for passionate hearts?

"But I must proceed to the question of inspiration. There is no doubt that you, gentlemen, have read about burglaries almost superhuman in plan and execution. In the newspapers they usually have headings like the following: 'A Colossal Theft,' or 'An Incredible Burglary.' And in such cases the

heads of bourgeois families exclaim: 'What an unfortunate thing! If the resourcefulness of these outlaws, their remarkable knowledge of human psychology, their self-control and bravery, their wonderful powers of acting were only turned in the right direction! How much good they might do for the country!' But it has long been known, gentlemen, that the heads of bourgeois families were made by the great Creator for the purpose of saying generalities and insipid things. It has even happened to me—I must admit, gentlemen, that we, thieves, are rather sentimental—to stand in a park or at the seashore, admiring the beautiful sunset, and I never failed to hear somebody near me say, 'And if some artist should paint a picture like this, nobody would believe him,' and when I turned around, I always beheld a self-satisfied, fat, complacent head of a family who is overjoyed at his own stupidity after having repeated a stupid remark of somebody else's. As for the country, the bourgeois regards it as he would a fat turkey; his only desire is to get the best piece he can and eat it in some secluded spot, and praise God. However, this is beside the point. My hatred for everything insipid has led me to digress, and I shall have to apologize for unnecessary words. But the point is that genius and inspiration, even though they are not turned to the use of the Orthodox Church, are still rare and beautiful things. Everything in the world progresses and there is creative activity even in the thieves' profession.

"Finally, our trade is not so easy and pleasant

as it may seem at first sight. It requires long experience, constant exercise, slow and painful training. It consists of hundreds of careful and skilful feats, which are accessible only to the most expert of tricksters. But I should not like to speak to you without offering you any proofs, and I shall therefore, gentlemen, permit myself to perform a few experiments before you. I wish to assure you that all those taking part in it are perfectly safe. All of us are legally free at the present time, and although it is certain that we are followed, and our faces are well known, while our photographs ornament the albums of all the police offices, still, at the present time, we have no need to conceal ourselves from anybody. If, at some future time, you should happen to recognize any one of us in different circumstances, please conduct yourself in accordance with your professional duties, as well as your obligations as citizens. As an expression of our gratitude to you for your kind attention, we have decided to declare inviolable your private property, to place it under the thieves' taboo. However, let us proceed."

Turning back, the orator said:

"Sysoy the Great, step forward."

A gigantic, round-shouldered fellow, with his hands reaching nearly to the knees, a man almost without forehead and neck, having the appearance of a sleepy circus giant, moved forward. He was smiling stupidly, and, to hide his emotion, kept scratching his left eyebrow.

"But there is nothing for me to do here," said he in a hoarse voice.

But the gentleman of the sand-colored suit was already addressing the assembly:

"Gentlemen, you see before you a much respected member of our organization. His specialty is opening trunks, blowing safes, and other depositories of valuables. Sometimes, in the course of his evening work, he has to make use of electric current taken from light transmission, in order to fuse metal parts. Unfortunately, there is nothing here on which he can show his best numbers. He can open faultlessly any door with the most complicated lock mechanism. By the way, this door is locked, I take it?"

Everybody turned around to look at the door over which there was a sign reading: "Strangers are not allowed behind the scenes."

"Yes, this door is evidently locked," said the chairman.

"Splendid. Sysoy the Great, will you be so kind?"

"That's nothing at all," said the giant contemptuously.

He walked up to the door, shook it a little, carefully, with one hand, then took out of his pocket a small shining instrument, and made a few scarcely perceptible motions with it as he bent over the lock. Then, suddenly, he stood up and opened the door quickly and noiselessly. The chairman followed his motions with a watch in his hand: the whole operation did not take more than ten seconds.

"Thank you, Sysoy the Great," said the gentleman of the sand-colored suit politely. "You may return to your place."

But the chairman objected with a little alarm:

"I beg your pardon. All this is very interesting and instructive. But tell me is the art of locking doors also a part of your colleague's art?"

"Ah, *mille pardons!*" The gentleman bowed hastily. "I had forgotten that. Sysoy the Great, won't you be so kind?"

The door was locked just as skilfully and noiselessly. The colleague returned to his place, waddling and smiling.

"Now, I shall have the honor of exhibiting to you the art of one of our representatives whose work consists in picking pockets in theatres and railroad-stations," continued the orator. "He is very young, but by his skill you can judge to a certain extent of what he will develop into with the proper amount of application. Yasha!"

A dark young man, wearing a blue silk shirt and patent-leather boots, who resembled a gypsy, walked forward, perfectly at ease, and paused beside the orator, playing with the tassels of his belt, and winking merrily with his large, insolent, black eyes.

The gentleman of the sand-colored suit said:

"Gentlemen, I shall have to ask you, if one of you would not agree to submit himself to a little experiment. I assure you it will amount to nothing but play."

He looked at the lawyers before him. The short, stout, black Karaite stepped forward from behind his table.

"I am at your service," said he, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Yasha!" The orator nodded to the young thief.

Yasha walked up to the lawyer. In his left hand there was a piece of embroidered silk cloth.

"If, for instance, in a church or, let us say, in the theatre or the circus," he began in a soft, thin voice, "I see a 'frayer' . . . I beg your pardon, sir, something like you . . . there is nothing insulting in this word. It simply means a decently dressed gentleman who is likely to notice very little. Well, in the first place, what objects can there be? Why, there are all sorts of things. We usually start with the watch. Again, where can you find it? Some carry their watches in the upper vest pocket, right here, and some in the lower pocket, over here. The pocket-book is usually in the trousers pocket. Except when some fool will put it in his coat pocket. Then again, there is a cigarette-case. Of course the first thing to do is to see whether it is gold or silver, because what self-respecting man would even think of bothering with a leather cigarette-case? Now a cigarette-case may be in one of seven pockets: here, here, here, over here, here, over there, or here. Isn't that right? So we act accordingly."

Saying this the young thief smiled, looking the lawyer straight in the face and pointing to the different parts of his clothes with rapid motions of his right hand.

"Again we might take a look at his pin. But we do not take it nowadays, except very rarely. It is very seldom now that men wear real stones, and so I come up and speak to him most politely: 'May I

have a match, sir?' Or something else. At any rate, I start up a conversation. And I look him straight in the eyes like this. And I work with only two fingers, this one and that one."

Yasha raised his right hand to the level of his face and moved the index and the middle finger.

"Did you see that? The whole music lies in these two fingers. And there is nothing wonderful in this at all: one, two, three, and the thing is done! Any man who is fairly clever can learn the trick easily. That's all. A very ordinary thing. Well, thank you."

The thief turned around and started walking back to his place.

"Yasha!" said the gentleman of the sand-colored suit weightily and significantly. "Ya—sha!" he repeated sternly.

Yasha paused. His back was turned to the lawyer, but it was evident that his eyes were begging something of the orator, for the latter knitted his brows and shook his head.

"Yasha!" he said for the third time, this time with a threat in his voice.

"Well . . .!" exclaimed the young thief angrily, and turned again slowly toward the lawyer. "And where is your watch, sir?" said he in a thin voice.

"Oh!" exclaimed the lawyer.

"Now you see," continued Yasha reproachfully, "you were watching my right hand all the time and I was using my left hand to get your watch. The whole thing was done with these two fingers under this bit of cloth. That's what I have the cloth for.

And as your chain is not worth much, just a string that some lady must have given you, I left it to you as a souvenir. Here you are," added he with a sigh, returning the watch.

"Isn't that skilful!" said the lawyer a little shamefacedly. "I didn't notice it at all."

"That's our trade," remarked Yasha proudly.

Then he returned to his colleagues. The orator in the meantime drank a little lemonade and then continued:

"And now, gentlemen, another of our colleagues here will show you a few ordinary card tricks which are in use on ferries, boats, and railroad-trains. With the use of three cards, for example, a queen, an ace, and a six, he can easily. . . . But perhaps, gentlemen, our experiments have bored you?"

"No, not at all; all this is extremely interesting," answered the chairman politely. "But I should like to ask you, if my question will not strike you as indiscreet, what your own specialty is?"

"My own? Why it would not be indiscreet at all. I work in large jewelry shops and also in banks," replied the orator with a modest smile. "But do not think that my trade is easier than others. In the first place I know four European languages to perfection: German, French, English, and Italian, not counting Polish, Ruthenian, and Jewish. And so, Mr. Chairman, shall I continue the demonstration?"

The chairman glanced at his watch.

"Unfortunately, we have too little time left," said he. "Would it not be best to come to the matter

itself? Especially since the experiments which we have just witnessed have convinced us sufficiently of the skill of your colleagues. Is this so, Isaac Abramovich?"

"Yes, indeed!" readily agreed the lawyer.

"Very well," agreed the gentleman of the sand-colored suit. "Grafchik," said he, turning to a curly-haired, blond fellow, "put your little device away. It won't be needed. I wish to add but a few words, gentlemen. Now that you have convinced yourselves of the fact that our art, even though it does not enjoy the enlightened patronage of personages in high stations of life, is nevertheless an art, if you have, perhaps, agreed with me that it is an art which requires many personal qualifications besides constant labor, danger, and unpleasantness, you will believe me, I hope, that it is possible to become attached to our art and, no matter how strange it may appear at first sight, to love and to respect it. Now imagine that a well-known and talented poet, whose legends and poems ornament the pages of our best magazine, suddenly receives an order to write an advertisement in verse for some brand of cigarettes signed with his name and for which he will be paid at the rate of three copecks per line? Or suppose that one of you, brilliant and famous lawyers, should be suddenly accused of dealing in perjury for divorce cases or of writing petitions for teamsters in some tavern? Of course your friends and relatives and even your acquaintances will not believe this, but the rumor itself will cause you unpleasantness and may result in painful

experiences. And now imagine that this disgraceful slander, originated by some one unknown to you, threatens not only your good name and normal digestion but your liberty, your health, your very life?

"This is precisely the situation in which we, thieves, find ourselves after being slandered by the newspapers. Permit me to make a remark here. There is a category of scamps—*passez moi le mot*—whom we call '*mothers' sons*' and with whom, alas! we are sometimes mixed. These men are without shame or conscience, a set of beggars, idiots, sluggards, drones of clerks who steal without knowing how. They are ready to live upon money provided by a prostitute, like the male mackerel who swims after the female and feeds on its ejections; they will attack a child in a dark alley in order to take three copecks away from him; they will murder a sleeping man or torture an old woman. These are the scourge of our trade. The charms and the traditions of the art do not exist for them. They follow us, real, skilful thieves, as jackals follow a lion. Let us say that I have succeeded in making a large theft. But I want to dispose of the goods. I leave two-thirds of their value in the hands of money-lenders who buy them from me; I have to give a part of it to these scamps if they happen to hear anything about my work. I call them *motients*, which comes from the word *moitié*, meaning a half or what is spoiled; strange philology, I agree. I have to pay him money because he knows something and might inform the police. And it often happens that after receiving the money that I give him, he still

runs to the police, betrays me, and earns an extra five roubles. We, honest thieves . . . yes, yes, gentlemen, you may laugh, but still I say, we, honest thieves, despise these reptiles. We have another name for them, shameful as a brand, but I dare not say it here out of respect to the place and to the company. Oh, yes, they will readily accept an invitation to take part in a massacre, but the mere thought that we can be classed together with them is a hundred times more insulting to us than even the accusation that we took part in the massacre.

"Gentlemen, as I spoke, I noticed several times that there was a smile on your faces. I understand you perfectly: our presence here, our appeal for help, finally the very existence of such an unexpected phenomenon as a systematic organization of thieves, sending its delegation consisting of thieves and the delegation being represented by a professional thief—all this is so original and so new that it cannot but cause you to smile. But now I shall speak from the bottom of my heart. Gentlemen, let us throw aside our outer integuments. Let us talk as men to men.

"We are all literate, we all like to read, and we read not only the fantastic adventures that our writers choose to invent in order to represent our work. Do you think that our hearts did not bleed, our cheeks did not burn, as after a blow, during that whole, unfortunate, disgraceful, cursed, and shameful war? And do you think that our souls are not full of wrath when our country is trampled under foot, is shot to death, beaten with the whip, and spat upon by wild,

beast-like men? Is it possible that you will not believe us when we say that we, thieves, greet with endless joy every step of the liberation?

"Each one of us understands, perhaps as well as you lawyers, the real significance of these massacres. Following every great crime or a shameful failure, whether it be the execution of a martyr, in some dark corner of a prison, or the loss of popular confidence, some one hidden and invisible becomes afraid of the possible wrath of the people and leads it into the channels of Jewish massacres. Some diabolical mind invents these massacres, these gigantic cupping-glasses, these cannibalistic games for darkened souls.

"But we all realize that the bureaucracy is in its last throes. Will you forgive me if I speak figuratively? A certain people had a large temple in which, behind a screen, dwelt a bloody divinity, protected by priests. Human lives were sacrificed to this divinity. But once, the hands of some great men tore away the screen, and then every one saw that in the place of a god there was a gigantic, greedy spider. Then they shot at the spider, tore him to pieces, but even in the fury of his last agony, he stretched out his limbs throughout the ancient temple. And the priests themselves, already condemned to death, put within the reach of this monster all those whom they could grasp with their fingers, shaking with terror.

"I beg your pardon. What I said was undoubtedly wild and meaningless. But I am somewhat excited. I beg your pardon. I shall continue now. We, professional thieves, know better than anybody else how

these massacres are organized. We go everywhere, to the slums and the market-place, and the eating-rooms and the lodging-houses, and the public squares and the docks. And we can swear before God, before men, and before the future generations, that we ourselves see how shamelessly, almost openly, the police organize these dreadful massacres. We know the police, every one of them, no matter how they are disguised. They invite many of us to take part, but even the lowest scoundrel among us refuses to give even a false, forced consent.

"You know, of course, how everybody in Russia regards the police? They do not enjoy the respect even of those who make use of their services. But we despise them and hate them three or ten times more. And not because many of us were tortured in police-houses, in those actual torture-chambers, where we were beaten with rods, with rubber sticks, and like instruments in order to torture us into confession or a betrayal of our comrades. Of course we hate them for that. But we, thieves, who had tasted of imprisonment, love liberty with mad passion. And for that reason we hate all prison officers with the bitterest hatred of which the human heart is capable. Let me say a word about myself. I was tortured three times by the police. My lungs and my liver are scarcely fit for use. Every morning there is blood in my saliva. And if I were given assurances that I were to ward off another torture like that by merely shaking hands with the chief of police, I would refuse to do it.

"And now, the newspapers say that we took from

the hands of the police this money of Judas, dipped in fresh human blood. Now, gentlemen, this is slander which pains us to our very soul. Neither money nor threats nor promises will ever make us hired fratricides or their accomplices."

"No, no!" came from the orator's companions. "Never!"

"I shall say even more," continued the thief. "Many of us even protected the victims of the massacre. Our friend here, who is usually known as Sysoy the Great—you saw him but a minute ago, gentlemen—was staying at that time with a Jew on the Moldavanka. With an iron poker in his hands he saved his host from the hands of a whole crowd of murderers. It is true, of course, that Sysoy the Great is possessed of gigantic physical strength, and this fact is well known to many of the inhabitants of the Moldavanka. But you will surely agree with me, gentlemen, that at that moment Sysoy the Great looked death straight in the face. Another of our colleagues, Martin the Miner," and the orator pointed to a pale, bearded man with beautiful eyes, who was standing behind the rest, "saved an old Jewish woman utterly unknown to him, when the crowd of this rabble was pursuing her. His head was broken with a piece of iron, his hand was injured in two places, and one of his ribs was broken. He has just left the hospital. This is how the stronger and the more passionate of us acted. The others were shaking with wrath and weeping in their impotence.

"Not one of us will ever forget the horrors of those

bloody days, of those nights illumined by the flames of conflagrations, of those cries of women, of those tortured childish corpses mutilated and disfigured beyond recognition. And not one of us believes that the police or the rabble are the cause of this awful massacre. These little, stupid, disgusting beasts are but the brainless fist ruled by a dastardly clever brain, excited by a devilish will. . . .

"Yes, gentlemen of the legal profession," continued the orator, "we are thieves and we deserve your contempt. But when you, better men, will need brave, skilful, and obedient fellows for your barricades, men who will meet death joyfully and gladly for the sake of the best word in the whole world, 'Liberty,' is it possible that you will drive us away simply because of your old aversion?

"Why, the devil! The first victim of the French Revolution was a prostitute. She mounted on the barricade, tucked up her skirts, and shouted: 'Now, soldiers, which of you will dare to fire at a woman?' The devil!" exclaimed the orator in a loud voice, striking the marble table with his fist. "She was killed, but, by God! her action was magnificent and her words immortally beautiful!

"If, at that great moment, you will drive us away, we shall say to you, 'O spotless cherubim! But do you know that if human thoughts could wound and kill and deprive men of honor and property, which of you, O innocent doves, would not be worthy of the knout and prison?' And then we shall go away from you and construct our own desperate barricade, and

we shall die with song on our lips. Will you not envy us then!

"However, I become excited, and I beg your pardon. I shall finish. You see, gentlemen, how our feelings were aroused by the slander that the newspapers heaped upon us. Believe us that we are sincere, and do something to clear us of this bloody and disgraceful spot with which we have been so unjustly branded. I have finished."

He walked away from the table and joined his comrades. The lawyers were whispering among themselves, just as judges do during a trial. Then the chairman arose and said:

"We trust you absolutely, and we shall do everything in our power to clear you of this unjust accusation. At the same time my colleagues have requested me to express to you, gentlemen, our profound respect for your ardent civic feelings. As for myself, I should like to ask the representative of the delegation for the privilege of shaking hands with him."

And these two tall and serious men shook hands.

The lawyers were leaving the theatre. But four of them stopped for a few minutes, looking for their things. Isaac Abramovich could not find his new gray hat. In its place was hanging a cap bent out of shape.

"Yasha!" was suddenly heard from the outside. The recent orator was saying in a stern voice: "Yasha, I say it to you for the last time, the devil take you! Do you hear? Well?"

The heavy door opened. In stepped the gentleman of the sand-colored suit. He was holding the gray hat in his hands; on his face was a polite, pleasant smile.

"Gentlemen, I beg your pardon. A rather unpleasant, funny incident took place. One of our comrades inadvertently took this hat instead of his cap. Oh, it is yours? I beg your pardon. Here, doorman, why don't you keep your eye on things, eh? Here, let me have that cap now. Once more, I beg your pardon, gentlemen."

And bowing most politely, with the same pleasant smile on his lips, he quickly walked out into the street.

THE PARK OF KINGS

(A Fantasy)

IT was the beginning of the twenty-sixth century of the Christian era. The life of men on earth had changed beyond recognition. The colored races of mankind had already blended completely with the white races, adding to their blood that health, firmness, and longevity which are so characteristic of all hybrids and mongrels among animals. Wars ceased forever in the middle of the twentieth century, after dreadful slaughters in which the whole civilized world took part and which cost mankind tens of millions of human lives and hundreds of billions in money. Man's genius had rendered mild the severest climates, had drained swamps, had dug tunnels through mountains, transformed the earth into a luxuriant garden and a gigantic machine-shop, the productivity of which had increased tenfold. Improvements in machinery reduced the working day to four hours, while work became compulsory for everybody. Vices disappeared entirely and virtue blossomed out. To tell the truth, however, all this was tiresome enough. And it was no wonder that in the middle of the thirty-second century, after the great South African insurrection, which took the form of a protest against the existing wearisome order of things, the whole of humanity, in a frenzy of intoxication, entered again upon the

road of war, blood, plots, corruption, and cruel despotism, and, for Lord knows which time in the long history of our planet, destroyed and turned into dust and ashes all the great achievements of the world's civilization.

But the contented prosperity which preceded this elemental destruction came as by itself, without blood or violence.

The rulers of the earth obediently and silently gave in to the spirit of the times; voluntarily they came down from their thrones in order to lose themselves in the masses of the people, and take a part in its creative work. They realized that the charm of their power had long since become an empty phrase. It was not for nothing that for centuries in succession their princesses had been running away from the palaces with servants, grooms, gypsies, and wandering magicians. And it was not for nothing that their princes and grand dukes pawned their hereditary sceptres and laid their thousand-year-old crowns at the feet of courtesans, who used them as ornaments for their false hair.

But some of their descendants, blindly, haughtily, fearlessly, and, in a way, tragically certain of the divine and endless character of their power, which rests upon them by reason of heredity, contemptuously refused to live in common with the masses of the people and never ceased to regard themselves the rulers and the fathers of the people. They considered it below their dignity to commit suicide, which in their minds was a degrading weakness, unworthy of persons of

royal blood. They refused to dim the halo of their escutcheons by contracting marriages below their rank, and their effeminate, thin, white hands were never made dirty by physical work, which they still considered the lot of slaves.

Then the popular government, which had long since abolished prisons, violence, and punishment, decided to build for them in a beautiful public park a large, light, and comfortable house with a common sitting-room, dining-room, and parlor, and with smaller but comfortable living-rooms. Their food and clothes had to come from voluntary contributions of the people, and the former rulers tacitly agreed to regard these small gifts as the legal tribute of their vassals. And in order that the existence of these grand personages should not be wholly aimless, the practical government decided to permit school children to study the history of the past by observing these living fragments of past times.

And so, gathered in one place, left to themselves and to their inactivity, they soon began to deteriorate in body and become degraded in soul within the walls of this public asylum. Their external appearance still retained an afterglow of their former grandeur. Their fine faces, rendered noble by careful selection in the course of hundreds of generations, still retained their sloping foreheads, their eagle noses, their strong chins, fit for medal profiles. Their hands and feet were still small and shapely, as formerly. Their movements were still majestic, and their smiles charming.

But they were such only in the presence of strangers

who came to visit the park. When left alone within the walls of their asylum, they changed into wrinkled, groaning, sickly old men, envious, suspicious, quarrelsome, and unfeeling. In the evenings they usually played cards, two kings and two grand dukes. When dealing, they would be polite and calm. But their mutual dislike, which always accumulates among men pent up together, added to their nervousness and irritability, spoiled their relations. The King of Sardinia would remark most politely to the Duke of St. Bernard:

"I hope, your Highness, that you have not put away an extra ace of clubs, as you did on a former occasion?"

"Only the activity of my enemies and the lowering of the standard of morality could compel me to live in the same cage with such an old monkey as you, sir."

They all knew perfectly well that the card representing the queen of diamonds had a corner torn off, and that the nine of spades had an ink stain on its back. But, making a little compromise with conscience, they secretly made use of these signs.

Sometimes at dinner they would still repeat high-sounding phrases, like the following:

"My people and my army. . . ."

"Oh, if you only knew how my father was loved by his subjects. . . . And they are still. . . . Why, I could show you a letter which I have received from my party. . . . Only I don't know where it is just now."

"Yes. And I, too, have received information about a powerful movement on foot in my country. . . ."

"People must at last come back to their senses and return to the legitimate order of things. . . ."

But no one ever heard these mutterings, and if any one had heard, he would not have believed them. They all had but one loyal subject, a thoroughly convinced advocate of royal prerogatives, their half-blind, deaf, one-hundred-year-old servant, a former soldier.

Their empty life was full of intrigues, gossip, spying. They would look into each others' cups and pots, table-drawers, beds; would reproach each other with having all sorts of diseases and old-age infirmities, and were all jealous of the Count of Loire, whose wife had opened a little store near the park and thus was able to send cigars to her royal husband.

Their sons and daughters had left them long ago in order to lose their identity in the masses of the people. But on holidays the princes were visited by their wives and their old mothers, who, like all women, were not permitted to go to the "House of Kings" on week-days. They brought with them all the gossip that they had heard in the streets and on the public squares; they spoke to their children of hopes which could never come true, and together with them dreamed of improving the methods of agriculture and spoke of how necessary and important it was for the country to grow Swiss roses, asparagus, and to raise Angora cats. And after such conversations the poor old kings saw in their night dreams fire-

works and parades, and balls and triumphs, and vast mobs of people howling with joy. And after sleepless nights, they would awaken ill and uncomfortable, and would watch each other for the results of the medicine they would have to take.

The spring came again, as it had been coming for thousands of years past. Whatever happens, spring always remains a dear, bright, joyful holiday, just as its invariable companion, the Easter egg, always remains a symbol of the endlessness and fertility of life.

Fragrant poplar buds were already opening in the Park of Kings, the grass was turning green, and the still bare, soft earth, performing again the great mystery of motherhood, was exhaling a powerful and sweet odor. The old, beautiful, azure sky was again smiling through the branches of trees.

The crowned personages came out of their rooms and were walking slowly up and down the park paths, supporting themselves on their crutches. Spring always has an imperative appeal for young hearts, but even in the old blood of the kings it awakened a sad and undefined restlessness. To the young people who crowded the beautiful park on such fine days, they seemed even more distant, strange, and foreign, as though they had come out of the grave.

The old, lonesome, childless, widowed King of Trapesund, an old man of majestic appearance with a conical-shaped head, an aquiline nose, and a long silver beard, sat down on a green bench in the most secluded and far-away alley of the park. The spring

sun and air enfeebled his body as though intoxicating him, and filled his soul with a quiet sadness. As though in sleep, he heard the familiar remarks which occasional passers-by exchanged on seeing him.

"This is the King of Trapesund. You can see the portrait of his great-grandfather, Charles XV., surnamed the Indomitable, in the National Museum. Their faces are identical."

"And have you heard of his ancestor, Alfonso XIX., who ruined his country for the sake of his mistress, a French actress, and even sold the plans of his own fortifications to the spies of other countries?"

"And what about Louis the Bloody? Twenty thousand men were shot to death one morning in front of the barrack walls."

But the proud soul of the monarch who was rejected by his own people did not quiver and did not shrink before this ominous obituary. Yes, his forefathers were right in acting thus. Not only the king's wishes, but his whims as well, should be sacred to the people. And every man who dares to question divine power is worthy of death.

But suddenly he heard a gentle, childish voice, the sound of which caused him to raise his white head.

"Grandpa, why are you always so sad? Has anybody hurt you? Grandpa, let me give you this sugar Easter egg. You should not be sad on such a fine holiday. Look, grandpa, there is a little glass here, and back of it is a little lamb, eating grass. And when you are tired of looking at the egg, you can eat it. It is made of sugar."

The king drew toward him this kind, light-haired, blue-eyed girl, hitherto unknown to him, and said with a sad smile:

"No, my dear child, I cannot eat it. I have no teeth with which to eat sugar."

Now it was the girl's turn to stroke his wrinkled cheek with her little hand, as she said in her thin voice:

"My poor grandpa. You are so poor and so old. . . . Do you know what we will do? We have no grandpa. . . . Do you want to be our grandpa? Can you tell fairy-tales?"

"Yes, my dear child. I can tell beautiful old tales. About iron men, and victories, and bloody festivals. . . ."

"Well, that's fine. I will go out for a walk with you and get flowers for you, and make garlands. We will each put on a garland, and that will be fine. You see, I have some flowers now. The blue ones are violets, and the white ones snowdrops. I will sing you all the songs that I know. Will you come?"

And then a strange thing happened. The old king whom neither arguments, nor the words of his politicians, nor the cruel lessons of life, nor history had convinced, suddenly realized with his whole soul how ludicrous and useless was his stubborn faith in what was past. There suddenly awakened in him a desire for a family, for caresses, attention, childish prattle. And kissing the girl's light hair, he said in a scarcely audible voice:

"All right, my dear girl, I shall come. I was so

lonely during my whole life. . . . But what will your papa say? . . ."

Then the girl ran away and returned in a minute, leading by the hand a tall and sunburnt man with calm and deep-gray eyes, who said, taking off his hat:

"If you should consent, your Majesty, to do what the girl suggests, we should all be infinitely happy, your Majesty."

"Let my Majesty alone . . ." said the old man, rising from the bench and shaking hands with the citizen. "From now on my Majesty exists no more."

And they all three walked out forever from the Park of Kings. But as they were passing through the gate, the old man suddenly stopped, and when they turned back to him, his companions saw that a tear was falling down his white beard, like a diamond rolling down a sheet of silver.

"Do not think . . ." said the old man, trembling with emotion. "Do not think that I shall be . . . entirely useless to you. . . . I can . . . I can make beautiful boxes out of colored paper. . . ."

And overjoyed by his words, the little girl threw her arms around his neck.

AN EVENING GUEST

THE lamp throws a bright circle of even light on the table at which I am sitting. Everything beyond this circle is dark, empty, lifeless; everything is strange to me, forgotten by me. The whole world is concentrated in this small space, every ink stain of which, every cut and roughness is perfectly familiar to me. I want nothing else. The sheet of paper before me is blindingly white and its edges are sharply outlined against the green cloth. The seconds of the evening run by with gentle, hasteless monotony, and in that circle of light everything is simple, bright, congenial, close, familiar, and dreamy. I want nothing, nothing else!

But somebody knocks at my door. One, two, three. . . . In rapid and insistent succession come three dull, disquieting knocks. The dreamy fascination of the lighted circle immediately disappears, as a picture moves away from the screen. I am again in my room, in my home in the city. . . . Life has rushed in upon me, just as the noises of the street rush in through an open window.

Who is there on the other side of the door? In a moment he will enter my room, I shall see his face, hear the sound of his voice, take his hand. I shall touch him with my vision and my hearing, with my

body and thought. Oh, how simple is all this, yet how mysterious, incomprehensible, almost terrifying!

For there is not a single phenomenon, however trifling, that would not leave in me its indelible trace. The quiet stirring of a mouse under my floor, and an execution, the birth of a child, and the rustle of a leaf in autumn, a storm on the ocean, and the ticking of a watch, the embrace of a loved woman, and an ordinary advertisement—everything, large and small, consciously or unconsciously perceived by me, touches my brain and traces on it unintelligible lines and curves. Every instant of my life leaves an indelible, though unconscious, impress on my character—on my love or hatred of life, my mind, my health, my memory, my imagination, my future life, and, perhaps, even on the life of my children and my grandchildren. But I know neither the sequence of events, nor the time of their coming, nor their elemental force, nor their hidden meaning. . . .

I do not know what will happen to me to-morrow. . . . Only the shallow, self-satisfied, dull pharisees, or the chosen clairvoyants, with extraordinarily sensitized spirits, know it—or deceive themselves and others into a belief that they know it. I do not know what will happen to me in an hour or in a minute. I live like a player, and fate turns constantly my wheel of surprises.

Why is it that gambling excites people? Because if we stake a certain sum on the nine of spades, we cannot tell beforehand where it will fall: if to the right, we lose; if to the left, we win; because before our

very eyes the future immediately becomes the past, while our hopes and plans change into disappointment or joy; because a game of cards is also life, only more contracted and intensified, like life in a jar of oxygen; because in a game of cards we feel with our souls that before us walks a dread divinity that holds sway over probabilities and possibilities.

But the phenomena of plain, ordinary life do not affect us deeply; we live in their midst blindly and indifferently. And yet, every day, every hour, whether we eat, or hasten to a tryst, or sign a business document, or sit in a theatre, or play cards, or bring a new friend to our home, or buy or sell, or sleep or stay awake—in reality we are constantly drawing lots out of the colossal urn that life presents to us at each step. After all, in a game of cards there are only two chances: you either win or lose; while life has millions of chances, multiplied by other millions, and no tickets are blank. In a game of cards, when it is over, you pay in money immediately, while life has countless methods and dates of payment. Sometimes it pays with the miserliness of a money-lender, and sometimes with the extravagance of a man who has just come into a large fortune; sometimes its payment is open, like that of a charitable benefactor, and sometimes it is secret, like that of the Biblical widow; sometimes it pays with the suddenness and rapidity of a revolver shot, and sometimes with the slowness of an incurable disease. . . .

All this is inexplicable, mysterious, and, thanks to its simplicity, really dreadful. Imagine some tyrant,

a real human tyrant, a madman endowed with genius, who becomes weary of the ordinary forms of enjoying his unlimited power, and hits upon the idea of introducing in his kingdom an annual lottery of life. On a certain hour of the appointed day, the soldiers would drive all the people to a public square, in the centre of which would stand an enormous vase filled with cards, definitely stating in detail the life of each person for the coming year. Everything that human ingenuity can devise is stated on some of these cards: wealth, fame, power, disgrace, imprisonment, love, suicide, honors, exile, war, labor, titles, torture, capital punishment. . . . Now try to imagine yourself awaiting your turn in a crowd of the unfortunate subjects of this exquisite tyrant. Oh, how your face would suddenly turn pale, how your knees would begin to shake; when you would be led to the fatal urn, how painfully your heart would beat with two diametrically opposed, yet equally potent, desires—to hasten and to postpone the moment of your choice! . . .

And yet, we draw lots every day; only through blindness, superstition, cowardice, or plain habit, we never notice this, do not want to notice, do not think about it or believe in it. A man says: "I will order my life in such a way." Another says: "I know that a year or two, or ten years from now, I shall still be sitting in this chair, signing papers." Still another man is more certain of the fact that until his very death he will not leave the walls of his asylum than he is of the fact of his very existence. . . . And

if their confidence will not deceive them, these self-satisfied men will say to themselves or to their children, or to their friends: "Now, you see, I wanted to get those honors, and I got them. Persistence and labor will bring you anything you desire. Every man forges his own happiness." But their words are just as foolish and naïve as the words of the man who says, in order to prove his independence of fate, "Now I will strike the table with my finger," and does strike. And the former think even more foolishly than the latter, because their foolishness is more complicated and intricate.

For, in the first place, once a man becomes petrified in any one definite and final form, he enters upon the first symptomatic phase of death, for life consists in constant motion. In the second place, if we could show him, *as he is to-day*, his soul *of that time*, he would be astonished and would not believe that the soul is really his, and if he would believe it, he would be at a loss to explain those influences and concatenations through which it could have undergone such amazing changes. And in the third place, this man, who recognizes not the soul, but merely the filament that envelops it, will never understand that the most important phenomena of life—birth, love, and death—evidently for the purpose of striking us with terror, are subjected to the uncertitude of chance.

Who of us knows the meaning and the cause of our appearance in the world? Surely, our parents know least about it. In the conception and the birth of a child, in the formation of its soul and its body, and

therefore in the determination of its whole future life, thousands of causes play an equally important part. The dinner eaten during the day, the odor of flowers in the garden, the fragmentary tune implanted in the conscious memory—all these are possible factors, and there are thousands upon thousands of others. And the simplest and, apparently, least important of them, which remains unnoticed and totally forgotten, may prove to be the most important and potent cause.

It is the same in love. Who can tell when, where, and how we shall become enthralled by its power, beautiful, destructive, or disgusting? One can never know beforehand either one's wife or one's lover. A friend introduces me to some of his friends; while there, I meet others; through these, I meet a woman hitherto totally unknown to me. And when I am introduced to her, I do not know that at that moment I drew a ticket out of the urn of fate, upon which is written the following: "You are destined to eat at the same table with this woman for many years to come, to sleep next to her, to have children with her, to be called her husband." And how many times does it happen that two men, who are longing for years for an opportunity to meet, pass each other in the street, even touch elbows, and separate once more, perhaps never to meet again!

And the children! Have I ever thought of them before? Can I tell even approximately *what part* of my body, my mind, and my soul I shall transmit to them? And not mine alone; but those of my father

and grandfather and great-grandfather. Can I foresee all the occurrences, scarcely noticeable to me, but capable of proving fatal to my child, of leaving indelible traces on its soul?

And the end of all this is brought by death, by the true, yet most accidental guest of all, for whose coming we prepare ourselves involuntarily by our dress, our drink, our food, our home, our dispositions, our love, and hatred.

No, I know nothing of this life, understand nothing. With obedient, dull fear I draw my lot, and cannot even read the unintelligible inscription upon it.

And never before has this been so clear to me as on this night when the disquieting knock was heard at my door. "Here is fate," rushed through my mind, "come with her magic wheel." I must go and draw my lot. Who can tell whether the person standing behind my door has brought me joy or grief, love or hatred? Will his coming mark a turning-point of my life, or will it glide past, leaving a scarcely perceptible trace, which I shall immediately forget, and not recall until death or even beyond it? And a superstitious thought comes to me that if I were to ask loudly, "Who is there?" an indifferent, scarcely audible voice would answer: "Fate."

I say: "Enter!" Not a second intervenes between the sound of his knocking and my reply, but the thoughts which rushed through my head during that short interval of time have lifted up a corner of the curtain beyond which is hidden a black abyss; they have already aged me. And I feel that the nervous

knock has already drawn invisible threads between the man on the other side of the door and myself.

Now he opens the door. Another instant, and the simplest, yet the most incomprehensible of things will take place. We shall begin to talk. With the aid of sounds of different pitch and intensity, he will express his thoughts in the customary form, while I shall receive those sound vibrations and decipher their meaning, and the other man's thoughts will become mine.

Oh, how unintelligible to us, how mysterious, how strange are the commonest phenomena of life! And without understanding them, without conceiving of their true significance, we pile them one on the other, intertwine them, connect them, broaden them; we meet people and marry, write books, preach sermons, establish ministries, fight wars, conduct trade, make new inventions, and write history! And every time that I think of the vastness, complexity, darkness, and elemental accidentality of this general intertwining of lives, my own life appears to me like a tiny speck of dust, lost in the fury of a tempest. . . .

A LEGEND

THE tall, thin, long-haired man, in whose face were so strangely blended the paleness of a life full of starvation and moral impurity and the stern profoundness of inspiration, began to play on his violin. It was a majestic, fairy tune, plaintively beautiful in its upper notes, dominated by sombre sadness in the lower. There was something mediæval in it, something hopeless, unpleasantly sweet, cruel, prolonged, and terrifying.

The host, who considered himself a patron of music, dressed in a red dressing-gown, his large, light, wandering eyes glistening almost like those of a madman, arose from his chair, and, pretending to be overwhelmed by the ecstasy of creative inspiration, began to improvise a story to the music. And the studiedly irregular motions of his sleeves were overturning glasses and goblets on the wet cloth.

"It was long ago . . ." he began, closing his eyes and lifting up his chin, so that his words were curiously distorted. He seemed to speak like a foreigner, although he was of a well-known noble family, and a man of good education.

"It was long ago. . . . Oh, how long ago it was! Many ages have gone by. . . . Oh, how many ages. . . . And everybody has forgotten about this. It was so dreadfully long ago. . . ."

Suddenly a man arose from among those who were

sitting about the table. He had been silent until then, and very few knew him. Some one had brought him to this house and did not even go to the trouble of introducing him. He was poorly dressed, short and broad-shouldered, vulgar in appearance, with his hair cut in a peculiarly ludicrous fashion.

"Won't you please allow me?" said he, and there was entreaty in his voice.

The patron, stepping back like a clown, bending down and swinging his arms from his chest to the ground, said in the voice of a clown:

"Why, certainly."

"Start at the beginning," said the vulgar stranger, turning to the violinist.

His eyes met the eyes of the violinist for one short instant, and he began to speak with the first chords of the violin.

It was long, long ago. Many an old family has died out since then, many an ancient castle has been destroyed.

At that time the old castle was still standing on a rock in the middle of the lake. And everybody around knew that the lake was fathomless, that the castle was impregnable, and that the long iron bridge was raised at night.

From time to time the king sent letters to the owner of the castle, calling him his cousin, and offering him titles and honors. But the proud prince, instead of thanking the king, ordered the royal messengers to be hung on the towers of his castle. He

was afraid of no one. His castle was impregnable, and was always provisioned for a ten years' siege.

The prince was noble, strong, and madly brave, although he was already sixty years of age. With the merry cry of an eagle, terrible in the ruddy glow of tar torches, he galloped at the head of his knights, over the bridge, and beneath him the waves were splashing in the dark, and the hoof-beats of the flying steeds were like the sound of the waves. Then villages burned in flames, women wept, and the rich transports of travelling merchants were his booty.

No one knows why he married the girl he chose. Were there not enough beautiful women among the daughters of his vassals? Would not any daughter of a noble family be honored by his choice? He celebrated a wild wedding, drank wine, cast handfuls of diamonds to his servants, and constantly gazed at his young wife with his enormous, wild, colorless eyes. She was the daughter of a poor artist.

A long, long year went by, then another, and still another. The young wife grew pale and more pale; the dreadful eyes of the prince became more and more terrible. Villages blazed at night. Half-wild dogs devoured the entrails of the captive women sentenced to death.

Thousands of eyes attended upon the beautiful woman. But there was one pair that gazed upon her with gentle passion, that spoke to her: "Here is my life. Take it, if it is needed. I love you! . . ."

One day—so reads the dark legend—the prince returned from an expedition and found a young page

on his knees before the princess. He ordered the page led into the courtyard, and there put him to death by sending a bullet into his right eye.

He did not touch his wife. But he gathered his obedient, boisterous company, gave each one gold with the generosity of a king, and said to them:

"You are free. Go wherever you will."

And when the last of them had crossed the iron bridge, the prince himself raised it, broke the chain, and locked the great gates of the castle.

The knights turned around to cast a last gaze upon the castle, and, as they did so, they saw the prince appear in the highest window of the tower and cast the great iron key that locked the castle gates into the fathomless lake.

Year after year went by. No one ever learned the secret of the old, sombre castle. Now nothing remains of it but ruins, mosses, and dirt, where green lizards are creeping back and forth, and honeysuckles scent the silent air. What happened to those two human beings? Did they suffer much and long? Which of them suffered more?

No one, no one will ever learn the secret. The waves are dashing against the stone casements. . . . The old, terror-inspiring hoof-beats of galloping horses seem to resound through their splashing. No one will ever know the secret. . . .

And the quiet waves are splashing on the shore. . . .

Both became silent at the same time, the violinist and the improviser. And amidst the quivering silence

that still reigned around, the host sniffed sneeringly, and said:

"Is that all? Y—yes. Not much, but rather sad."

DEMIR-KAYÁ

(An Eastern Legend)

THE wind has subsided. It is possible that we shall have to spend the night in the open sea. It is about thirty versts to the shore. The two-mast ship is lazily rolling from side to side. The white sails are hanging helplessly.

A white fog envelops our boat. Neither the stars, nor the sky, nor the sea, nor the night are visible. We strike no light.

Seid-Ahbly, the old, barefooted, mud-covered captain of the boat, tells us a story in the truth of which I believe with my whole heart. His voice is low, dignified, and deep. And I believe in the truth of his story because the night is so strangely silent, because the invisible sea is slumbering under our feet.

And, enveloped by the fog, we are sailing slowly in the midst of the thick white clouds.

His name was Demir-Kayá. In your language, it means "Iron Rock." He was given this name because he knew neither pity, nor shame, nor fear.

His band of robbers was active in the vicinity of Stamboul, in blessed Thessaly, in mountainous Macedonia, and in the fertile pastures of Bulgaria. He himself had killed ninety-nine human beings, and among them were women, old men, and children.

But one day a powerful army of the Padishah—may Allah bless his days!—surrounded him in the mountains. For three days Demir-Kayá defended himself like a wolf brought to bay by a pack of dogs. On the morning of the fourth day, he cut his way through the ranks of his besiegers and escaped—alone. Part of his band perished during the struggle, the other found death at the hands of the hangman upon the round square of Stamboul.

Wounded and bleeding, Demir-Kayá lay by the fire in the inaccessible cave where he found refuge with wild shepherds of the mountains. But in the middle of the night a bright angel with a flaming sword appeared before him. And Demir-Kayá recognized Azraïl, the messenger of death sent from heaven. And he said:

"Let the will of Allah be done. I am ready."

But the angel said:

"No, Demir-Kayá, your hour has not yet come. Hearken now to the will of God. When you will arise from what is almost your death-bed, go forth and dig out of the earth all your treasures and convert them into gold. Then you will walk on toward the east, on and on, until you come to a place where seven roads meet. There you will build for yourself a house with large, cool rooms, with broad divans, with fountains of pure water, with a place where travellers can partake of your repast, drink aromatic coffee, and rest when they are tired. Invite them to your house, all who go past, and serve them as though you were their slave. Let your house be their house, let your

gold be their gold, let your labor be rest to them. And know that the time will come when Allah will forgive your heavy sins, will forgive you the blood of his children."

"But what sign will the Lord send me to show that my sins have been forgiven?"

And the angel replied:

"Out of the fire that is smouldering by your side take a burnt log, covered with ashes, and plant it in the ground. And when the dead tree will become covered with bark, and will begin to bloom, then the hour of your deliverance will have arrived."

Twenty years went by. Throughout the whole land of the Sultan—may Allah bless his days!—the house at the crossing of the seven roads, on the way from Jedda to Smyrna, was famous. The beggar went away from that house with rupees in his bag, the hungry went away after a rich repast, the tired went away rested, and the wounded went away cured.

For twenty years, for twenty long years, Demir-Kayá turned his gaze every evening to the marvellous stump of wood dug into the ground of his courtyard, but the wood remained black and dead. And the eagle eyes of Demir-Kayá grew dull, and the hair on his head became as white as the angel's wings.

But one morning, early, he heard hurried hoof-beats on the road and saw a horseman galloping toward him. Demir-Kayá ran to him, seized the horse by the reins, and began to beg the horseman:

"Brother mine, won't you enter my home? Step in and refresh your face with water, strengthen your-

self with food and drink, and sweeten your breath with the pleasant odor of smoke."

But the traveller exclaimed in wrath:

"Let me go, old man, let me go."

And he spat into Demir-Kayá's face, and he struck him on the head with the handle of his whip, and galloped on.

Then the proud blood of the robber flamed up in Demir-Kayá. He lifted a heavy stone from the ground, cast it after his offender, and broke his head. And the horseman fell to the ground on the dusty road.

With terror in his heart, Demir-Kayá ran to him and said sadly:

"Brother mine, I have killed you."

But the dying man answered:

"It was not you that killed me, it was Allah's hand. Listen to me. The Pasha of our district is a cruel, greedy, and unjust man. My friends have conspired to assassinate him. But I was won over by a rich reward. I wanted to betray them, and it was when I was hurrying with this information that the rock cast by you stopped me in my haste. The Lord wills it. Farewell."

With grief in his heart, Demir-Kayá returned to his home. The ladder of virtue and repentance that he had been ascending patiently for over twenty years had suddenly broken down under him and fallen to the ground on that summer morning.

In despair he turned his gaze once more to the spot where it was wont to pause, upon a black-burnt piece of wood. But, lo! A miracle! Before his very

eyes the dead tree was springing to life, was becoming covered with green buds. A moment, and it was in full bloom, with gentle yellow flowers interspersed in fragrant foliage.

Then Demir-Kayá fell on his knees and wept for joy. For he realized that the great and merciful Allah in his inexpressible wisdom had forgiven him the murder of ninety-nine innocent beings for the death of one traitor.

THE GARDEN OF THE HOLY VIRGIN

FAR beyond the bounds of the Milky Way, upon a planet which will never be disclosed to the eye of the most diligent astronomer, blooms the wonderful, mysterious garden of the Holy Virgin Mary. All the flowers that exist upon our poor and sinful earth, bloom there for many long years, never fading, ever cared for by the patient hands of invisible gardeners. And each flower contains a particle of the soul of a man living on the earth, that particle which sleeps not during our nightly slumber, that leads us through marvellous lands, that shows us the centuries gone by, that conjures up before us the faces of our departed friends, that spins in our imagination the variegated tissues of our slumber-being, now sweet, now ludicrous, now terrible, now blissful, that makes us awaken in unreasonable joy, or in bitter tears, that often opens before us the impenetrable curtains, beyond which stretch out the dark paths of the future, discernible only to children, wise men, and blessed clairvoyants. These flowers are the souls of human dreams.

Every time that the moon is full, in those hours of the night that immediately precede the dawn, when our nightly visions are especially bright, lively, and

restless, when the pale lunatics, with their eyes closed and their faces turned toward the sky, return to their cold beds along the dangerous edges of the housetops, when the night-flowers open their chalices—then the Holy Virgin walks through her garden with light and quiet steps. To her right, glides the round moon, while behind it, never tarrying, always keeping the same distance, flows a little star, like a small boat tied with invisible threads to the stern of a large ship. Soon both the ship and the boat disappear, buried in the vaporlike, orange-colored clouds, and, suddenly, they appear in the dark-blue space. Then their light lends a silvery hue to the Holy Virgin's blue chiton and to her beautiful face, whose charm and blessedness no man can describe with word, brush, or music.

And, fluttering in joyous impatience, the flowers sway on their thin stems and, like children, stretch out to touch the blue chiton with their petals. And Holy Mary gently smiles upon their pure joy, for she is the mother of Jesus, who loved flowers so dearly during his life on earth. With her thin, white, kind fingers she gently caresses the souls of children, the modest daisies, goldcups, snowdrops, veronicas, and the fairy spheres of dandelions. Boundless is her bounty, for it extends over them all: the daffodils, those beautiful love-flowers, the proud and passionate roses, the conceited peonies, the orchids, so terrible in their strange beauty, the bitter, fiery poppies, the tuberoses and hyacinths, that spread their heavy odors around the death-bed. She sends bright maidenly

dreams to lilies-of-the-valley, violets, and mignonettes. And to the plain wild flowers, the souls of ordinary toilers, wearied with the day's labor, she sends profound, restful sleep.

And she visits also the far-away corners of the garden, wildly overgrown with thorny, monstrous cactuses, greenish ferns, intoxicating hops, and the creeping, graveyard ivy, and to them all, despairing of joy on earth, disappointed in life, sorrowful, and grieving, gloomily hastening to meet death, she grants moments of complete forgetfulness, without dreams, without memories.

And in the morning, when amidst the gold and crimson dawn, the triumphant sun, ever burning with the fire of victory, begins to rise, the Holy Virgin lifts her clear eyes toward heaven and says:

"Be thou blessed, O Creator, who exhibits to us the sign of his greatness. Be blessed all his creation, too. Be blessed the sacred eternal maternity of the world. For ever and ever."

And the flowers send their reply in scarcely audible whisper:

"Amen."

And like holy incense their aromatic breath rises upward. And the bright face of the sun trembles, reflected in many-colored rays from each dewdrop.

On this night, too, the Holy Virgin walks through her garden. But sad is her beauteous face, lowered are the lashes of her bright eyes, powerless hang her arms along the folds of her blue chiton. Terrible

visions float before her: red fields and pastures, still reeking with blood; burnt homes and churches; violated women, tortured children; mounds and mountains of corpses under which moan the dying; groans, curses, blasphemy that breaks through the death-rattle and the cries; mutilated bodies, withered breasts, fields of battle black with ravens. . . .

Oppressive silence, as before a thunderstorm, overhangs the world. The air is perfectly motionless. But the flowers tremble and sway in fright as in a tempest, bending to the very ground and extending their heads to the Virgin with boundless entreaty.

Closed are her lips, and sad is her face. Again and again before her rises the image of him whom human malice, envy, intolerance, cupidity, and ambition sentenced to unbearable tortures and a shameful death. She sees him—beaten, bleeding, carrying upon his shoulders his heavy cross, and stumbling under its weight. Upon the dusty road she sees dark sprays, the drops of his divine blood. She sees his beautiful body, mutilated by torture, hanging by out-turned arms upon the cross, with protruding chest, and bloody sweat upon his deathly pale face. And again she hears his dreadful whisper: "I am thirsty!" And again, as then, a sword is plunged into the mother's heart.

The sun rises, hidden beyond dark, heavy clouds. It burns in heaven like an enormous red blot, the bloody conflagration of the world. And lifting up her saddened eyes, the Holy Virgin asks timidly, her voice trembling:

"O Lord! Where are the bounds of Thy great wrath?"

But relentless is the wrath of God, and none knows its bounds! And when, in grief and sorrow, the Holy Virgin lowers her eyes again, she sees that the innocent cups of gentle flowers are filled with bloody dew.